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ALBERT SHAW

WHO ONCE TAUGHT ME THE MOST VALUABLE LESSON AN ENGLISH TEACHER CAN LEARN

WHAT IS ENGLISH?

A BOOK OF STRATEGY FOR ENGLISH TEACHERS

BY

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PREFACE

Many of the ideas in this book have been elaborated as special articles, but the chapters are in no sense a set of reprinted essays. Thanks are due to the following journals for permission to adapt or use parts of what they published:

The English Journal

Intensive Spelling, Oct., 1914
Punctator Gingriens, Sep., 1915
We Must Not Be Enemies, Feb., 1916
The Bottomless Pond of *oes,* March, 1916
The Scale Illusion, April, 1917

Education

English Apparatus, Nov., 1915

Educational Review

What Is English? Feb., 1916

The English Leaflet

Inculcated Love, Feb., 1915
Defending Camelot, Oct., 1916

The School Review

A Platform of Grammar, April, 1916

Bulletin of the Illinois Association

Exploring the Comma, Nov., 1916

INTRODUCTION

A paraphrase of the Advertisement to *The Vicar of Wakefield* will serve to introduce this book. "A hundred doubts may be stirred by this manual, and a hundred things could be said to prove them groundless. But it is needless. A book may be useful with numerous over-statements, or it may be erroneous without a single emphatic remark. Such as are fond of pulpit-banging will turn with disdain from the author's simple work-shop. Such as mistake suave wording for sound teaching will find no help in this kit of tools for a laborer, and such as have been taught to deride accuracy will laugh at one whose whole stock of advice is drawn from the facts of a long experience."

English has until recently been considered above and beyond other subjects of the curriculum. Its function has been supposed to be the cultivation of insight into beauty, of charm and finesse in expression. Teachers have taken pride in the idea that their beautiful occupation had little to do with imparting facts to crassly ignorant minds; have felt little need of accurate knowledge or careful scheme of attack. Algebra, Latin, physics—these required a teacher to have definite information and to go about his instruction according to plans worked out through centuries of experience. But English—that demanded only hazy desire and the throb of inspiration. A large proportion of its teachers, in both school and college, have been dilettanteish,

amateurish, ignorant of fact, and scornful of system. They have professed horror at the notion that the main purpose of secondary English is to attack methodically the most rudimentary illiteracy. They have felt that such a proposal could come only from a mental blacksmith, and have thus made the mechanics of their art an almost unmentionable subject. But they have not denied the necessity of the gross mechanics, and in practice have done much good work.

Such a jumble of emotion and fact perplexes the novice. And there is another potent cause of perplexity—the experts in pedagogy. They occupy lofty positions, they thunder in conventions, they appal us with articles and books. Though they know nothing of the craft of teaching English, they tell us of noble aims: "Why instead of confining our students to English literature do we not make them acquainted with the first-class literature of mankind?" This from a prominent man in our oldest university. An even better-known man has written "authoritatively" about spelling. The only particles of information in his brochure are wrong in principle; there is hardly a sentence that presents anything concrete; the adjurations are mostly impossible to follow. Lest such violent language should seem the impertinence of a small man toward great ones, the reader is referred to an article in the *Unpopular Review* for July, 1916, "The Professor of Pedagogy Once More," written by a man who "for twenty years in several institutions has been next-door neighbor" to professors of pedagogy, and who "has on his shelves seventeen feet of pedagogic literature." This article is not savage or vindictive

or satirical; it rather good-naturedly states such facts as these: "Among the secondary school-teachers, of course, the professor of pedagogy is an oracle and a great man. And it is the secondary school to which, almost exclusively, he addresses his literature. . . . Few college professors would be so naïve as to discuss their methods with a pedagogical expert. . . . He knows, too, that only a sort of professional courtesy prevents them from frankly calling him a humbug. . . . His whole 'line of talk' reveals that he has never considered the question of dealing with responsible minds. . . . Their praises of the delights of literature and art have a curious way of suggesting, by the vagueness and generality of the terms, that these delights are being reported, rather than recalled from personal experience. . . . In the teacher of experience, who takes the pedagogical courses as a condition of promotion, they excite only ridicule and contempt."

Where can the novice look for counsel? He knows not what his objective is, nor what to do, nor how to do it, nor how to correlate the demands for literature and written composition and oral composition and spelling and grammar and "appreciation" and clear thinking and self-expression and sentence-structure and analysis of style—and so on, world without end. Inexperienced teachers perform one third of the English work in the high schools of the author's state, and probably that ratio holds for the rest of the country. They cannot rely on their texts for guidance as teachers of algebra can; and so rapidly have methods changed that they may get only misdirection by recalling how they themselves were taught when they were in school. So there is a

real use for a vade mecum which shall display what one man has observed, what he has found essential, how he drives at that objective, and what devices he has learned to employ. Such a guide may be wide of the truth in some particulars; not all of it can be used by any one reader. But it is a coherent body of practice which is available until a teacher has had time to build up a codex of his own. Everything here presented is the result of experience—an experience based on acquaintance with the product of many schools in all parts of the country. Every one of the suggestions has been tested for at least five years and most of them for twelve; some for eighteen. Hardly anything has been arrived at by experimenting with a preconception; everything has been forced upon the author by observing what was effective with particular young human beings who sat on material benches in an actual class-room.

For the most part a colloquial style has been used. The author has thought it better to say "I" and "you" and "don't" and "tackle," because he is a practical workman who fears formality when he is talking about his trade.

After this volume was ready for the press the author read Rollo Walter Brown's *How the French Boy Learns to Write.* Mr. Brown's inquiries were scrupulously and fully made; the results are carefully compiled and temperately expressed. Here is an epitome of the judgment of the world's most clear-sighted, most literary nation on the teaching of its mother-tongue. It appears that the French boy, "not superior in intellect to the American boy, and not aided by some sort of magic in his native language, writes with sharper accuracy of thought,

surer and more intelligent freedom." Yet France "does not believe that the great body of boys should be trained in any special graces, has no idea of making a great body of literary writers." "In the early grades the matters to receive chief attention are ordinary accuracy and conventional correctness." Simplified grammar, especially "the functions of words in ordinary sentences," is carried purposefully through the whole school course; teachers take the position that a boy's ability to express himself well "must eventually depend in large measure upon his skill *in handling the sentence,* and that this skill must come in part from deep-seated, long-established knowledge of sentence elements." France requires that every pupil in its *secondaire* schools "shall have his attention called to punctuation" from his eighth to his tenth years and shall be taught "the principles of punctuation" during the next two years. The success of these efforts may be gaged by one of Mr. Brown's experiments. A class of 28 French boys (aged 11 and 12) wrote from dictation a paragraph of English (64 words) which they had never seen before; 11 wrote without error. When the same paragraph was tried in American schools with 500 pupils of the same or higher grades, only 11 wrote without error—i. e., the younger French pupils were 18 times better. This is hardly so astonishing as a bit of evidence that the present writer can adduce: a set of twelve-minute themes, written at Cambrai for an American teacher of English at the lycée, mere class tests for idiom written by fourteen-year-old boys, written for a teacher who never had a word to say about punctuation—these show only two petty instances of carelessness with commas. France has

achieved in the schools, by the only possible method —patient and unrelenting care with fundamentals— what our best universities agonize over and can only partially attain. Anyone who is skeptical about the wisdom of *What is English?* will do well to read *How the French Boy Learns to Write.*

The most astonishing portion of this message from France is the answer to the question: "What is the objective in all teaching of the mother-tongue?" Our American answer has been that there is a double objective: 1. (minor) some graces of style, 2. (major) stimulating a taste for good literature. But France says: "It is the conviction of the great body of teachers, as well as the Ministry, that work in grammar, rhetoric, and literature is in most respects lost unless it contributes to the pupil's ability to give full, intelligent *expression to his thought.* Moreover, theories of teaching, and all the proposed changes in the course of study seem to be considered *first* in respect to their influence on this ability of the pupil. Expression is not the sole end, but in all the lower schools it is the *primary* end."

The voice of France speaks there. A voice is now being heard from American universities (see pages 17-22) that issues the same mandate to secondary teachers. It declares that originality without literacy is valueless. These voices must be heeded by one who would avoid failure. But the following of their counsel is a complicated task. It is the aim of this book to supply the knowledge necessary to success.

CHAPTER I

WHAT ENGLISH IS

No inexperienced teacher needs to be told what algebra is, or Latin, or German. Among teachers and superintendents there is no discussion of what these subjects are, nor is there wide difference of opinion as to just how they must be taught. If a novice were suddenly told to take an arithmetic class, he would not need to consult about what he was to do; his textbook would be in itself a sufficient guide. The long sets of problems, the careful grading of these sets from very easy to somewhat hard, the elaborate display of every step in working a new kind of problem, the wary and slow advance from one small difficulty to another—the whole plan of the book declares on every page that things which are simple to the teacher are perplexing to the child, that the teacher must take time and be thorough, that arithmetic is a long campaign in which the conquest of simple fractions is a huge operation.

But suppose the subject were new and that professors of astronomy, with little sympathy for children's minds, were furnishing the textbooks. Their brains have been engrossed with stellar parallax and the hyperbolic courses of comets. The result would be a preface explaining that "Arithmetic is an introduction to that noblest and most useful of sciences, to the science of quantity and arrangement, to the study of ideal constructions, and the discovery there-

by of relations between the parts of these constructions." The untrained teacher, trusting that the great savant knew his business, would dutifully require William and Susan to commit this precious truth to memory. Then he would begin with a lesson in subtracting decimals, quickly go through a page in long division, spend two recitations on fractions, devote three days to percentage, and so quickly proceed to quadratic equations and the plotting of curves.

This is exaggerated and sarcastic. Yet it comes much nearer to plain facts than any of us realize. It represents all too vividly the plainest and most painful truth about English textbooks. Most of them have been written in a literary atmosphere as different from school-room necessities as astronomy is from simple decimals. Their prefatory remarks are hardly less astonishing than the bit of fiction quoted above. One author writes: "An artist does not paint a masterpiece without continual effort, changing, modifying, perfecting his work by degrees. Only constant rewriting will help you to gain the power of self-expression." That may be as true as the definition of mathematics, but it is like the astronomy of rhetoric. Another author says: "After matters of technique have become so easy for us that we need to give them little attention, we may seek for something original to say"; and again, "When these elements of literary construction are once understood, the problem of composition is merely that of their effective combination." This is sheer astronomy.

Listen to four illustrations of the hard facts of practice: (1) It is all but impossible in four years to

train a whole class of bright boys to write *we shall* or to avoid *trys* and *crys*. (2) A professor in one of our oldest universities testifies that all he can exact as an English requirement for the degree of Ph.B. is reasonably decent spelling and punctuation; that to insist on skill in paragraphing would mean the withholding of so many degrees that other departments would protest. (3) One of our largest universities, which organizes freshman composition very strictly, gives a passing grade for mere freedom from mechanical errors. (4) A great state university, which has a high standard for entrance, announces to schools, in order that they may not go astray in English work, that the only requirement of candidates for admission is "proficiency in rudiments"; that candidates are qualified if their writing "is devoid of interest, originality, or any other literary merit." Yet this university has to organize every fall a large class for freshmen who are incompetent in mere mechanics.

These testimonies (a whole bookful of similar ones could be gathered) are recent. Twenty-five years ago, when English was brand-new, such statements would have been heard with horror; for rhetorics dealt mostly with astronomy—that is, with qualities of grace and charm. Fifteen years ago such statements would have been a little better understood, but few teachers would have sympathized with them. Ten years ago it still required courage to make any such declaration; it would have been likely to brand a man as mechanical, inartistic, soulless. The English-teaching world still directed its telescope toward the stars, still had that lofty literary ideal. Five years ago the harsh facts were beginning to be per-

ceived. In 1909 the Princeton catalogue spoke only of examination questions on "subject-matter, structure, and style of these books." In 1913 a very significant addition was made: *and his proficiency in English composition.*

From every college in the country goes up the cry, "Our freshmen can't spell, can't punctuate." Every high school is in despair because its pupils are so woefully ignorant of the merest rudiments. A reformation is everywhere demanded. It is being brought about, and so rapidly that most textbooks are stranded in the idealism of a decade ago, and many teachers are floundering badly in the new conditions. It is hard to keep pace with the swift change; hard to know what it is all about, or why our duties are preached to us in such contradictory terms. "Inspire" is still the watch-cry; "drill in rudiments" is soon to be the fact.

A bit of personal experience will show how times are changing. The first chapter of a draft of this book written three years ago had a legend in capitals: "This is not guaranteed wisdom; it is merely what I find it necessary to do." So much was it the fashion to denounce drill in rudiments that the book might have been less effective if it had spoken unqualifiedly. That fashion has so much changed now that I should feel no hesitation in saying, "This *is* guaranteed wisdom"; because every number of the *English Journal,* every talk with a college instructor, makes it plainer that English-teaching has been inefficient—sadly inefficient—and that we have had the wrong notion of our duty. In 1912, in the first number of the *English Journal,* a high-school teacher declared: "Everywhere the answer is the same. The

colleges cannot sufficiently condemn our product. . . . Business men tell us that our graduates cannot write a decent letter."

One possible misunderstanding must be here stated emphatically. If it can be removed, this will be the most important paragraph in the book. I am not arguing that *tries* is of greater importance than a lively introduction to a theme. I am not arguing that a semicolon is better than emulating the charm of Stevenson. I have not the least feeling that mechanical accuracy is more blessed than graceful style. I do not think any less of George Meredith because he once wrote *alright*. I am not in any way or degree, anywhere in this book, instituting any comparison between two such utterly unlike things as knowledge of mechanics and literary skill. That would be as monstrous as to compare ditch-digging with painting a madonna. Knowledge of how to form plurals or to use commas is one of the unloveliest things in an ugly world. It gives me no joy whatever. But my lack of joy has nothing to do with the case. The sad fact of nation-wide experience for a quarter of a century is that our effort to teach charming English has not amounted to much, and that our failure to teach decent English is so scandalous that men point the finger of scorn at us. Our first and simplest and plainest duty is to teach decent English. Not the most seraphic of the astronomers of rhetoric ever opposed that idea. But we have thought this elementary part of the task so easy that it could be performed incidentally, as a sort of side-issue. Actually it is very hard, requiring careful approach, skilful handling, and arduous labor. That first task must be done first. This book denies none

of the glorious possibilities that may lie beyond. Its purpose is to assert that what is of primary importance must have foremost consideration.

That is what English is today—the teaching of plain essentials of decent style. When it first became a college-entrance subject, it was generally defined as "power to appreciate literature." Examinations required the candidate to show some ability to criticize and appraise literary values. The attention of high schools was fixed on the reading of classics, on developing "insight," and on writing about books "appreciatively." This kind of thing lasted through the 90's and into the present century. How resultless it all was may be judged from a paper written in 1905 by a Harvard examiner, in which he calls the fetish "that indefinable and vague quality." He would not have dared to utter those words ten years previously. Now he is not afraid to say: "So few possess 'literary appreciation' that after a careful search through the higher graded books of the spring and fall examinations of the last two years I have found no specimen to quote which possesses more than a semblance." This college instructor longs just as much as ever for the teacher who can "inspire the writer with something of the spirit that awakens the consciousness of literary appreciation"; but has to protest that as a matter of fact no such power has been evidenced on the Harvard papers.

Then he proposes a substitute: "To create and give utterance to his own ideas; freer, more natural, and more individual expression; his individuality counts for everything." That has been the slogan in the twentieth century. All our texts and councils and addresses to conventions have had much to say

of "expressing ourselves in a pleasing way." They have seldom failed to imply the scorn which this Harvard man put so fiercely: "Teaching this living, breathing English composition as mechanically as they do the unchangeable and rigid laws of science." Hence few teachers have dared to profess publicly that they paid any attention to mechanics. The word has been anathema. No, we have all been for pleasing self-expression.

But these glittering ambitions were all the while covering a most hideous reality, which it was not good form to discuss. The ugly fact of horrible illiteracy was not to be mentioned in our soulful circles. The Harvard man politely referred to it in his paper as "what the examiner ought not to find." Since it must not be named, he employed that delicate euphemism. He adroitly said, "The familiarity of the teacher with what I am talking about warns me to omit discussion." Even when he is "tempted to present a few examples" of this unmentionable thing, he chooses blunders in diction and cases of wobbly structure. It is curious to see how very, very refined the world was in that by-gone age—for ten years is a historical epoch in the history of English.

Yet the Harvard man misrepresented a great body of university opinion. Colleges loathed and dreaded the slipshod preparatory work, but failed to insist that we should do with thoroughness the humble part of our duty. They failed because there was no agreement on the question of what English is. What they longed for was carefulness; what they were principally occupied with themselves, what they talked about before us, was "appreciation." We have all been confused, at variance, unguided. The colleges

have misled us; high schools, planning their courses for students who are not to receive further education, have assumed a college attitude, have fixed their attention on "appreciation" and "living, breathing composition."

If we were so eager to imitate when the model was "appreciation," we should be no less eager to imitate now that the model is "accuracy first." Very lately we have had the unabashed confession from four high-minded university instructors that they condition a theme in the first semester of freshman year for three misspelled words or one incomplete sentence.* They may be all wrong. This book has nothing to do with any discussion of whether they are right or wrong. It deals only with the present-day facts. And there is not the slightest doubt that these gentlemen fairly represent the sentiment of their age about carefulness in details. They say flatly that "originality without literacy cannot in any place or under any circumstances be considered a meritorious quality in a college course in English composition." What do you suppose they would think about school themes?

We have seen the three steps—literary appreciation, spontaneity, accuracy. Do not suppose that they are steps downward. Education in this country is not descending. Do not suppose that they show a conflict of purpose or any disagreement as to what real merit is. All sensible teachers must agree on what constitutes a good theme, do agree always that ability to apprehend literary values and to express

* See the very interesting article on "Grading Freshman Composition" at the University of Illinois, in the *English Journal* for Nov., 1915.

oneself pleasingly are the only qualities that make writing valuable. These steps do not mark any change in a judgment that has never altered since Cadmus invented letters. They simply show a progressive realization of what cannot be obtained in school composition. All professors still prize and give credit for "appreciation"; but they very seldom get it, and they cannot require it. All teachers still value spontaneity, and we get quite a bit of it; but we have learned that it is not a curricular subject, that we cannot require it. What we can require, what it is dishonest and criminal not to require, is accuracy. It is frightfully wrong to stimulate a little spontaneity (!) in a few pupils while leaving all the pupils so ignorant of mechanics that their letters prove them to be uneducated.

Fifty years from now the student of educational history will be puzzled to know what we thought we were doing in 1916. His unflattering comment will run about like this: "Those teachers were not stylists —at least very few were. Why did the great majority suppose they could impart what they did not possess? They must have seen that only a small minority of pupils could achieve a graceful style; what did they suppose they were doing for the majority? Did they even flatter themselves that the minority's charm of style was due to instruction? And suppose this power to write pleasingly had been much more general, what was the prodigious exercise of it all about? Did teachers conceive that they were training up professional authors, or were they counting on private theme-writing as an enjoyment comparable to amateur painting or piano-playing? It is hard to see the similarity. Were they aiming at

literary letters? Nothing is so affected and unpleasant. Why, then, all their parade of 'perfecting the work by degrees'? What did they think they were doing?"

I, for one, am glad that I shall not have to answer those straightforward inquiries. English ought to be the greatest good to the greatest number. Perhaps we could see more clearly what we make it if we paid more attention to that future historian.

You may be surprised that we have so much to say about composition, for you know that themes are only one part of English. You would be excusable for thinking them a very small fraction. Glance through this list of the different things that English is. It represents graphically the impression we might get from reading a few dozen pedagogical articles, though it is shorter and less confusing than the reality would be. Small capitals indicate the topics that would stand out more prominently because of their frequency or the deep feeling with which they are discussed:

> A LOVE OF LITERATURE, the college entrance books, supplementary reading, narratives and expositions, TEACH CLEAR THINKING, grammar, coöperation with other departments, magazine reading, imitate Burke or Homer or Goldsmith, spelling, teach paragraphs by an analogy with geometry, stimulate refined speech, coach dramatics, prosody, analyze masterpieces, memorizing of poems, INSPIRE A LOVE FOR CLASSICS, DON'T TRY TO IMPOSE THE CLASSICS, history of English and American literature, read to the

pupils, teach effectiveness in writing, insist on precision in writing, don't look for precision, encourage charm and freedom, STIMULATE INSIGHT, declamations, oral composition, teach play-writing, CHOOSE A WIDE VARIETY OF READING, develop personality, CULTIVATE SOUND TASTE IN LITERATURE, have private conferences, much reading aloud by the pupils, argumentation, word analysis, have pupils correct the themes, THE LOVE OF GOOD READING, correct pronunciation, DON'T USE ANNOTATIONS, teach criticism of the art of different authors, insist on theme outlines, coach debaters, REFUSE TO BE HAMPERED BY NARROW COLLEGE REQUIREMENTS, business English, dictionary work, ENCOURAGE GOOD READING.

Perhaps some of these extra-curriculum tasks, like supervising dramatics or debating or journalism, may fall to your share. Nothing will be said in this book, however, about such matters, because local conditions vary extremely and because your own good sense can get little help from another man's advice. They are largely questions of your own talents and initiative. The whole mass of jumbled English reduces to three subjects, of which the first is how to read—called Literature. This is now the part of English that receives the largest share of attention, the part that may always take up the largest portion of time. It may in the future, when elements of composition are properly taught in the grades, occupy an even greater proportion of the schedule. But to this subject, in spite of its importance, I shall

devote only one chapter. Handling literature is largely a matter of personality; advice about methods is likely to be futile; and the world is already full of good counsel about what to aim at. The second subject is how to speak—called Oral Composition. I am as sensitive as the next man to the horrors of our slovenly and clumsy vernacular, but fear that they are for the most part beyond the reach of schooling; because they are founded in infancy, are ingrained by home training, and are as deep and wide as any other social phenomenon that we find disagreeable. Written forms can be taught; they are a veneer put on by the school. But when we get beyond some superficial matters of syntax and pronunciation it is easy to overestimate what a school can achieve in changing habits of speech. The practical value of learning to compose one's thoughts for addressing a crowd is beyond all reckoning. Indeed this power is so unusual and so difficult of attainment that I fear some teachers deceive themselves as to what they are accomplishing. Even if I had their faith I should abstain from discussing Oral Composition for the same reasons that influence me to be brief with Literature: advice cannot guide very far in such a matter of personality, and plenty of advice is available.

The third subject is Written Composition. That is the necessity without which all else counts for naught. Parents are glad to have Thomas know some lyrics by heart, are pleased deeply if he acquires at school a fondness for reading Thackeray; but their gratification turns to ashes if Thomas's letter to his grandfather is barbarously spelled and punctuated. Business men may not be wholly indif-

ferent to a knowledge of *Sir Launfal,* but they will not accept it as an excuse for unbusinesslike spelling and punctuation. Colleges are devoutly interested in having young people taught to read, but will not accept any amount of appreciation in lieu of some small measure of ability to spell and punctuate. With one common judgment the world insists on a modicum of knowledge about framing sentences.

So that even if it were desirable to take up those higher and more beautiful departments, there would be sufficient reason for limiting ourselves to decent writing. There is another reason which, though it is not a certainty, has great weight. In 1915 the uniform college-entrance requirements for the whole country were so altered that instead of a blend of Literature and Composition in papers *a* and *b* we now have a first paper on Grammar and Composition and a second paper on Literature. This is a most significant cleavage. It formally splits apart two subjects that have always been inextricably blended in the common conception of English. It is a recognition of a difference that has never been acknowledged before. It displays one subject which no college or technical school can disregard, and another subject to which any faculty could be indifferent without serious danger—just as it can be to Greek or Latin or to some history or music or painting. Literature is just like these things in being infinitely more enjoyable to the human race, but not indispensable in an academic schedule. It is possible that it will soon be classed with them as an optional. Its status is now an open question. At present it had better not to be stressed in a manual that deals with permanencies.

In fact the scope of this book is still further restricted. Little will be said about authors as models; very little about the planning of a whole composition; not much about paragraphs. The following chapters aim at decent sentences. If these seem to you a petty corner of English, you are in need of enlightenment. The art of teaching a commonplace mind how to construct a series of reasonably good sentences can be no more than outlined in this space. It reaches deep into psychology, and can be partially acquired only by a patient resourcefulness that taxes a teacher's best powers. When we have called English the process of creating decent sentences, we have given an ample definition, one that proposes a vast field of endeavor. You shall see.

CHAPTER II

DESCENT TO EARTH

A man who presumes to offer advice is more likely to succeed if he addresses someone in particular. To have in mind teachers in general while I write is to court failure. I have chosen to imagine that "you" who read are a college graduate who has been electing a good deal of English during the last two years. You have your diploma and are engaged to teach English at the Smithboro high school. During the summer you are rather vaguely wondering whether you had better be doing anything in particular to prepare yourself for the new work. You have been assigned to freshman English, and have therefore been reading over the classics you are to teach and have carefully gone through the rhetoric you are to use. Is there more to do? You have an uneasy feeling that you don't know what is expected of you beyond exhibiting some of that critical shrewdness and exerting a literary uplift—being a center of sweetness and light. Quite by chance a friend has put this volume into your hand.

Of course "you" are all sorts of people. Occasionally teachers of five years' experience know no better than to look over another man's ideas, for they never can tell where they may pick up useful hints. But I shall always speak as if to one who has never taught, for I have known so many cases of English-teachers-to-be who would have been grate-

ful for some simple guide-book. Not that they would follow it trustfully (skepticism is the only safe attitude toward any advice of the kind set down here), but that they could get some definite program, some platform however opinionated and distorted, from which they could depart. It is more useful to stir you to a procedure of your own than to persuade you to an easy acquiescence. These chapters are not to be swallowed, but to be pondered.

In another way my readers are very heterogeneous: some will have all the English and parts of other subjects in a small school; others will have one division of one class in a large city school. One may have complete liberty to follow his own judgment; another may have everything prescribed. But "you" are going to Smithboro, where you will have a good deal of chance to exercise your own judgment; and "you" are the sort of person who wishes to know the essentials of his trade in all conditions, so that he may be fitted to do best in present circumstances and to go with assurance to a different position.

The purpose is to furnish the general strategy of that long, long process of teaching how to form good complex sentences. The tricks of the trade, the knowledge of facts may be so presented that a teacher can profit by other people's failures, learning in a few hours what he might struggle toward blindly for years—as I did. This manual will not inform you how to convey spiritual values. It is only a set of mechanical aids for teaching mechanics. Any author who promises more is not likely to perform.

I will first explain something that is true of every

college graduate when he begins to teach English. He has a feeling that his knowledge of the subject is broad, catholic. He has come down from the stars upon the narrow texts and the ignorant class. Not that he is conceited. Far from it. He may be all humbleness, may feel too sensitively his shortcomings. But after his senior electives or graduate specializings he feels that the little earth of school is all surrounded and comprehended by his wideness. This feeling is a hindrance. If you can get rid of it, you will be in a condition to get better results with elementary lessons, because you will begin to realize the great work that can be done. You will accomplish much more than this: you will be ready to see how large the earth really is. It merely appears small at first to one who has been studying astronomically of how Shakespeare's genius was not for originating plots, of Chaucer's indebtedness to Boccaccio. It is actually as wide, as full of wonders, demands as keen exploration, as the skyey regions that you have been mapping.

One reason why it seems restricted is that you encounter such marvelous ignorance of what seems to you common knowledge. In the secondary world *to be* always takes an object, *discribe* is the form preferred by pupils who have read Cicero, Plato is the ruler of the underworld, the art of *Silas Marner* is "where Eppie was put in the coal-hole." It is almost impossible to feel that those who make such blunders have minds as good as your own. They have. That is the great truth for an English teacher to keep in mind. A teacher of algebra is differently situated; he does know everything and the pupil knows nothing. But the English teacher is a fellow-

being. He never can know a tithe of what may be useful and is always in peril of showing his ignorance. Only yesterday I learned *mumpsimus,* a word I have always needed; and after twenty-five years of zealous consultation of the dictionaries I pronounced *rationale* like a French word. When I set myself at age forty to learn French irregular verbs, I found myself hardly getting a passing mark; a boy who was excessively dull in an English class thought I was a numskull when he tried to teach me how to use a telephone switch-board. When I pause to consider the ignorance of pupils, I usually find it less wonderful than my own.

Another cause of that feeling of restriction appears much less excusable—that is, the violence and persistence of error that has been again and again dilated upon. Yet even this is not so discreditable to the young minds as you would suppose. The explanation is usually that in lower grades they have been allowed to confirm themselves in wrong habits; the wrong forms are fairly engraved in their brains. When you tackle *seperate,* you are like young Thor who supposed he was wrestling with a feeble old crone, whereas his opponent was the serpent who held the earth together. *Seperate* is a tremendous antagonist, who looks feeble enough, but is in reality the greatest force in life, evil habit. You have warfare before you; titanic forces are to be grappled with. To know in advance what you must contend against is an advantage beyond exaggeration. Nearly the whole difference between an experienced and an inexperienced teacher is that the former has acquired a handy code of these troubles, so as to be able to anticipate them; and also a set of methods for stamp-

ing truths upon youthful brains. The aim of this book is to supply some devices of this sort.

Knowing what to do means knowing what not to attempt. The most probable mistake of a novice will be struggling with choice of words. All Americans are deeply sensitive about diction, feeling that this and the other use of a word is "wrong." Not in politics or religion do men entertain such violence of prejudice. "Good English" always means in popular speech correct choice of words. There are persons who would rather go to jail than say "had rather"; every printer of a restaurant menu knows that *welsh rabbit* is a vulgarism; one very refined old lady always substitutes *jerkin* for the indecent *sweater*. There is no limit to which such a list could not be extended. Every rhetoric contains a choice assortment. A list of errors in diction compiled by a university for the guidance of teachers contains the following: *burglarize, firstly, retrogress, aggravate* for *vex, fix* for *plight, near-by, to down, cannot help but, in back of, lessen* for *diminish in number.*

Have nothing to do with such things. For one reason, the time you put upon them is badly needed elsewhere; for another reason, most such objections to common idioms are pure ignorance, for every word listed above has good warrant. *Firstly* is used by several writers in the *Britannica,* and *lessen* is defined by the *Century* as "contract in number, diminish." I never open to a list of "faulty diction" without some new shock; the latest was to learn in a handbook of business forms that *very much appreciate, beg to state,* and *not a one* are "bad English." An hour spent with Professor Lounsbury's *Schoolmastering the Speech* will prove the inanity of all

similar efforts to brand everyday idioms as "incorrect." Every teacher who reads J. Lesslie Hall's *Studies in Usage* (Scott, Foresman & Co.) will be saved a vast amount of worry over "bad English" which is not bad at all, which should never delay a theme-reader for an instant. Some of this pedantic ignorance is due to bad logic (like arguing that *stop* means to cease motion, and therefore *stop for the day* is wrong); some of it is nothing more than misinformation that happened to find lodgment, grew into sturdy prejudice by being repeated, and finally became an object of veneration. If this sounds presumptuous or bitter, read Dr. Hall's book.

Even if such "bad English" were really much worse, there is a powerful reason for paying small attention to it—namely, that you will spoil all the emphasis that ought to be reserved for *had of known, thusly, borrow* for *lend, had ought.* When you protest against *fix,* you destroy the faith of pupils in your judgment about *had of known.* Keep your powder for the blowing up of such gross and ridiculous things as *had of known.* There are more serious mistakes of policy, but none so truly pathetic, as this of lumping together monstrous blunders with reputable colloquialisms. The really bad idioms will give enough to do. *Had ought* and *couldn't hardly* are lifelong habits and will not be eradicated in one year.

You have noticed, and you will frequently see as you read on, that the writer has a tendency to challenge textbooks. This is unfortunate, for no one is so tiresome as the man who has no hesitation in shouting that all the world is mistaken. Be assured that the writer has no sympathy with reckless out-

cries against authority and will never on any account obtrude personal opinions. Every protest is backed by good authority. Acquire the habit of challenging everything in the books you use, not quarrelsomely, but inquiringly. The more you do so, the more you will be convinced that because our subject is so new and has been dealing so much with matters of taste a large proportion of the textbooks are tainted with ignorance—not only of facts, but of right methods. A novice who is not on his guard may be sadly misled.

As to ignorance of methods, remember that those elaborate designs of assembling a lot of ideas, writing them all out as they occur, assorting them roughly in a first draft, pruning and extending and recombining for a second draft, polishing and refining for a third draft—remember that all this may possibly represent what some authors have done with a heap of material to be condensed into a weighty chapter, but that it also is what many authors have never done, is what no child ought to try to do. It is astronomy. You are now on earth, where only certain things are true, where many things are worse than useless, where we *walk* instead of swinging a telescope about.

CHAPTER III

INTENSIVE SPELLING

Why one person can spell and another can not is as deep and unanalyzable a mystery as why we laugh. No acceptable solution has ever been offered. One mother who observed her four children from infancy testifies that two were born to spell and two were born to struggle in vain. You can infallibly divide your class the first day of the year into spellers and non-spellers. Some uninteresting, narrow-minded people are spellers, and some versatile and esthetic people are not spellers. Some authors and critics cannot spell. But most of them can. There is no classification by general traits.

The case is comparable to that of people who can draw and who can not. One seems to notice outlines, and so can reproduce them; the other never really sees an outline. Whether this difference is as deep as an instinct or as shallow as an accidental turning of interest in early years there is no knowing. But it is the nearest I could ever come to a formula for attacking a poor speller. *Notice* the words; get an *interest* in the forms. If a poor speller is trying to improve himself, that is the direction in which to steer.

This is a frail help. No amount of urging it and pleading for it will do much toward bringing up the average of a class.

All experienced teachers develop mnemonic de-

vices for startling a child's attention, trying to make an impression so striking that it will recur when next the child starts to write the wrong form, that it will "run out and bite him." One teacher tells his classes that in the second syllable of *separate* they ought to find their father. Another plot against carelessness is to write on the board s-e-p, wait a moment until attention is concentrated, then dash down an A a foot high, then finish in small letters. No plan is bizarre enough to prevent *seperate* from appearing on some theme within a week. "De+scribo" written out extravagantly, with scathing or burlesque accompaniment, and repeatedly exhibited with variations for weeks, will not kill *discribe*. A dining-room is a *dinning*-room and a writer is a *writter* to the end of a year of drill for some obdurate minds—yes, to the end of three years. This sounds discouraging, but think how much better it is to know what is coming than to go through the year without knowing what you are to expect.

Several professors in different parts of the country have been at work on this Augean problem. They have hardly gone deep enough in their published monographs, but their trend is unmistakable. They are discovering that the trouble is *with a few words*. It is a momentous finding. When the school world has all heard of it, and when later we all believe it and work on the basis of it, a new era will have dawned in secondary English. How far we are still in darkness may be judged from a paragraph in Cook and O'Shea's *The Child and His Spelling*, 1914: "How many words should a child be able to spell when he finishes the eighth grade? Estimates made by various teachers and administrators and

professors ran all the way from five hundred to fifteen thousand. A rough estimate of the number of words presented to the typical pupil of a first-class elementary school gives from eight thousand to ten thousand. The average elementary speller contains upwards of six thousand words." This, mind you, is in the grades! The conclusion of the investigators is that their lists of 763 are a minimum for the lower grades, and that an additional 2200 should be studied in the upper grades. This advice seems to me fearfully beyond the truth, for it means that children are to learn such words as *legislature, minimum,* and *opportune.*

One investigator who anticipated them by a year reached a much lower minimum. In *Concrete Investigation of the Material of English Spelling,* by Professor Jones, of the University of South Dakota, are tabulated the misspellings in 15,000,000 words of theme-writing done by pupils in the grades in four states. Here are some quotations from his comments on the data.

1. Indeed the very words that give most trouble in spelling are almost invariably found in the second or third grade lists, and faithfully reappear throughout the subsequent years. Over nine-tenths of all words misspelled by the 1050 grade students are found in these two lists.

2. From the standpoint of usefulness this second-grade list is worth many times as much as all the other lists combined.

3. Since these troublesome but useful words are not pointed out and effectively dealt with in these early grades, our handling of the most dangerous spelling material is not efficient, and students go on

misspelling, year after year, words that should be mastered in the early school years.

4. Since grade students commonly use from 500 to 2500 words in writing, yet on the average misspell but about fifty words, not one child out of a thousand misspelling as many as one hundred words, our spelling problem is not so gigantic as it is commonly believed to be, for the reason that a handful of words misspelled over and over by each student has misled us in our judgment.

5. The twenty-words-a-day lesson should disappear.

It is instructive to see how this staid scientific report waxes emotional when it discusses the misspellings of simple and commonplace words. Mr. Jones presents a list of "One Hundred Spelling Demons of the English Language." Surely this is an authentic demonology and is worth presenting.

("Order not significant after first four," says Mr. Jones.)

which	used	lose	ready
their	always	Wednesday	forty
there	where	country	hour
separate	women	February	trouble
don't	done	know	among
meant	hear	could	busy
business	here	seems	guess
many	write	Tuesday	says
friend	writing	wear	having
some	can't	answer	just
been	sure	two	doctor
since	loose	too	whether

believe	coming	cough	would
knew	early	piece	built
laid	they	raise	color
tear	half	ache	making
choose	break	read	dear
tired	buy	said	instead
grammar	again	hoarse	easy
minute	very	shoes	through
any	none	tonight	every
much	week	wrote	enough
beginning	often	heard	truly
blue	whole	does	sugar
though	won't	once	straight

I know nothing about spelling in the grades, nor how many words ought to be taught. But it is a fact that most pupils are advanced to the high school without knowing the "demons," that somehow the grade teachers in their efforts to teach five thousand have not taught *their* and *meant*, that these wrong habits have become fixed almost ineradicably, that most secondary spelling consists in trying to overturn the vicious misspellings of a few hundred common words. This is so important that it must be explained rather fully.

The best introduction is a pair of quotations, the first from a learned treatise on spelling: "We do not yet know with any show of accuracy which of these one, two, or three thousand words are persistent sources of error among large numbers of people." The other quotation is the words of a mere high-school teacher: "It has been the privilege of the writer to follow one pupil through the four years' course of English with the one word *benefiting*, only

to be compelled to explain the derivation and the rule for doubling ten times to the same individual during the fourth year."

Every secondary teacher does know which words are persistent sources of error. If you should confront a grade teacher, a high-school teacher, and a professor of rhetoric with the forms *stoped, wierd,* and *finaly,* you would get from each the same weary smile of recognition; each one knows that from kindergarten to fiftieth reunion, from Maine to California, from grocer's boy to successful novelist, it is the same three hundred deadly words that betray illiteracy. A college graduate who can't spell *idiosyncrasy* is excusable. College examiners needn't worry if a candidate for admission writes *maintainance*—provided he never writes such forms as *noticable* or *occassion.*

Cease to worry about the three thousand; make a bloodthirsty attack on the three hundred.

I was fifteen years in discovering that most of my spelling troubles were confined to a few hundred very common words and a few dozen type-forms. All that time I faithfully dictated the thousands—*scythe, knead, porcelain,* etc. During the first five years I was quite unconscious that I wasn't getting anywhere; during the next five I slowly learned that some forms like *seperate* and *discribe* were deathless hydras; during the last five I discovered that it was infinitely harder to get rid of *dissapoint* and *definate* (and infinitely more useful) than to teach a hundred forms like *musician* and *engineer.* Why more useful? Because the *dis* words are used a hundred times as often. Why more difficult? Because as spelling is at present organized a heedless pupil may slip

through the grades writing these common words wrong year after year. A firm, an all but unbreakable habit is formed, which may, in some cases, defy the most strenuous attack in the high school.

The day will come when every grade teacher will be supplied by his principal with an authorized list of Words That Must Be Started Right. It is criminal to spend time on *banana* or *crystal* until *too* and *their* are habitually spelled correctly *when the writer's attention is on a composition.* They must be paraded on the blackboard, dilated upon, written and sounded with exaggerated emphasis, dictated, returned to and returned to. But even then the work is only begun; until the knowledge is habitually applied *when the main attention is elsewhere* the spelling lessons are vain.

This last year I have been observing a class of average boys preparing to take final entrance examinations for college, all of whom had studied Latin for four years, had passed paper *a,* and nearly all of whom had been strictly drilled in spelling and punctuation for from four to six years. Their most frequent error was writing *to* for *too.* Not, mind you, that the second *o* was carelessly omitted; the nature of the error was usually misspelling. *There* for *their* occurred with enough frequency to drive a teacher insane. *Replys* persisted to the end of the year, and one boy, who had been under my care for six years, wrote *planing* for *planning* on his college paper. His was an obdurate mind; but if for six years before he came to me he had been allowed to exercise the bad habit, he was not entirely to blame for not overcoming it in the next six.

One more exhibit may do good. It is a list of the

misspellings *in a spelling test* made by a class of seventeen, corresponding to the second year of high school, near the end of the school year. All of the class had had unremitted violent instruction in the few hundred common forms—five of them for one year, seven for two years, and five for three years. The one-year boys did not contribute all the errors—nor did the three-year boys fail to contribute.

once	askes writting beleive dispair	twice	wierd childrens'
three times	trys	four times	thrushes's

This difficulty of rooting out an old habit, of fixing a new one in its place, of insuring the operation of the new habit *when the mind is busy expressing ideas,* is quite beyond the comprehension of any professor or critical parent. It passes the understanding of the teacher himself. Although at present I regard myself as a spelling fiend, still I am sure that a decade hence I shall look back upon my present self as mildly unconscious of the forces against which I struggle.

The essence of these forces is always confusion. Some psychologist of the future may formulate the mental mix-ups; at present we guess and grope. But our minds must be cleared of the idea that we deal with mere heedlessness. Consider *shepherd.* Every boy and girl is confronted throughout his life with

such spellings of the proper name as *Shephard, Shepard,* until his mental picture is a blurred and inextricable composite. *Askes, fourty, villiage, dispair, shure, controle, fiew,* etc., are easily referable to parallel correct forms; *minuite* may be due to *biscuit.* Oral confusions only partially account for such mistakes as *probally, atheletics, supprise, enimy.* Of a different sort and more complicated are errors in using suffixes. It is quite impossible for the trained mind to realize the alertness necessary in an immature mind, during the rush of a written test, if the knowledge of altering final letters is to be properly applied. For example, the teacher finds *enjoies,* is inflamed with wrath, wonders if the pupil has any mentality; inquires the next day in class about *replies* and *employs,* and finds that the understanding of the principle is perfectly clear; confronts the pupil with his idiotic *enjoies* and savagely demands whether his brain is larger than a pea; the modest answer is, "I got mixed up." Bright boys, whose accuracy in a spelling test is invincible, will in themes write *ladie's, dinning room, does'nt,* and be just as puzzled as the teacher when the errors are disclosed. The old ignorance is always slipping in to confound the recently established knowledge. In some form or other misspelling is confusion.

Therefore the first object of intensive spelling is to establish order. "This is invariably done"; "such a form does not exist"; "when must you always double?" "*Henrys* ought to look as strange to you as snow in July"; "there are only three preterits in *aid*"; "only *ex, pro,* and *sub* take *ceed*"—and so on eternally, the old "alwayses" and "nevers" being unremittingly presented until they

are deeply planted in careless minds, take root, and crowd out the confusions.

It is the opposite of this plan, it is creating confusion, to present *there* and *their* together, or *seize* and *siege,* or *all right* and *already.* When you display as a group of freaks *seize, weird, either,* emphasize them as three of a kind, repeat them and expatiate upon them, then you make one clean-cut impression; for a few in the class that one presentation is indelible. If you then say anything about *siege,* you smudge the mental diagram; for some in the class you may have created permanent confusion. If *all right* gets fervid comment in a recitation (never is that wrong form to be exhibited), then there must be nothing said that day about *already*; for that would be to construct disorder.

Examine your own processes, if you have any memories of that remote period when you had any slight troubles with spelling. Suppose you were in doubt about *cemetary.* Did it help you to pair it with *secretery?* Was it your custom to put dissimilar words together and say, "Now, I will remember that the first is different from the second"? Suppose that when you were a bit flustered before a class you had to declare the proper spelling of a word, would you wish mental pictures like these?

incompat { i / a } ble emba { r / rr } ass

incontest { i / a } ble ha { r / rr } ass

Most of us have to put the similar forms together. Once we have learned "stationery is not used in a

cemetery," no embarrassment can make us err with either word. By some mnemonic device we fix the impression of two *r's* in *embarrass;* by another device, in another brain-cell, we fix one *r* in *harass;* if we pair them, we are lost.

The author can cite a striking proof from his own recent experience. A spelling test of twenty choice words that have been bowling over all the pedagogues was dictated to him. One is *caterpill*$\left\{ \begin{matrix} a \\ e \end{matrix} \right\}r$. Even the disciplined teacher's mind was confused; for it had seen both forms frequently, had previously looked up the word, had thought of the two together (one as old, one as new); now, in the test, it hesitated, was confused, was lost. If that mind had grouped similar forms, had once said *caterpillar* is like *pillar,* it would have acquired knowledge.

The whole system of intensive spelling is to build groups of words that corroborate each other. *Almost, already, always, altogether* belong together, help each other. *All right* must be kept as far apart as possible in time and thought. "There is no such thing as an adjective in *us,*" we must insist, "no such thing as an adjective in *full*"; later we may casually mention *bogus* and *citrus,* or comment on *crop-full.* "Speeches every week" will teach the spelling of two words; "he speaks in a weak voice" will, later, teach two others. But "he speaks a speech" may unteach spelling for life. *Lose, move,* and *prove; laid, paid, said; exceed, proceed, succeed; divide* and *divine;* he hadn't a *particle* of *principle;* the *principal* man was a *practical* man; *ninth, truly, argument; decision* and *occasion*—all such group-

ings help to build up an assured and lasting knowledge.

There is no other clue to the labyrinth of *ie* and *ei*. "Always expect it to be *ie* unless you know definitely to the contrary." Learn the four cases in which it is *ei*: (1) when the sound is that of long *a* or long *i;* (2) when the sound is short *i* or short *e* (except *mischief, kerchief, friend,* and *sieve);* (3) after *c* (except *financier);* (4) in six freaks: *seize, weird, leisure, either, neither, inveigle.* For practical purposes the two great points to emphasize are: (I) always write *ie* for the long *e* sound—*piece, believe, fierce, siege,* etc.—except *seize, weird,* and *neither;* (II) always *ei* after *c.*

The whole matter can be remembered by the following jangles, the plan of which is to suggest the rules in the first lines and the exceptions in the next two:

1. *I* before *e* when sound is long *e*
   Seize, inveigle, either
   Weird, leisure, neither
2. *Ei* after *c* or when sound is not *e*
   Financier, fiery, and mischief
   Friend, sieve, view, and kerchief

This looks complicated to you; much more will it to your pupils. But so far as I know, it is the only rule given under heaven among men. If you approach it one step at a time, getting yourself and the class gradually familiar with it, it will finally seem almost as simple as "Thirty days hath September." Should you not wish to use it, you can at least do valuable work (and the important part) by emphasizing the two points suggested above.

I will add a paragraph about some exceptions; not because it is very useful and certainly not because your classes will ever need it, but so as to give assurance against embarrassment if a pupil should suddenly spring one of the forms. There are no exceptions to long *a;* use for illustration *sleigh, freight, rein, vein, feint, their, heir.* The only real exception to long *i* is *fiery,* for such forms as *lie, vie, tries* do not give trouble on this score, are not entered for discussion; use for illustration *height, sleight, stein, meistersinger, seismograph, kaleidoscope, eider-down, heigh-ho.* Words in short *i* are *foreign, sovereign, surfeit, counterfeit;* the only exceptions I know are *mischief, kerchief,* and *sieve.* "Short *e*" is put in above simply for completeness; the only one I have noted is *heifer* (though often *leisure*); the only exception is *friend.* One speller makes a point of *glacier* as an exception to the *c* rule, another is worried about *ancient,* and we might add *species;* but these, on account of their *sh* sound, give no trouble, do not belong in this class. There are a number of exceptions to long *e,* but none that are likely to occur on themes; *plebeian* is a possibility; *seignorage* is an impossibility; Scotch forms like *weir* and *teind* are not in court; nor archaisms like *teil; sheik* and *obeisance* have a common pronunciation in long *a. Lieu* is like *view.*

The first draft of this solution of *ie* and *ei* was printed in the *New York Times* in 1897, has been constantly checked up since, and may be trusted; though there is not the least doubt that shortly after this book is published I shall wish I had slipped in one more comment or exception. Remember: All these ins and outs are not your business, but your

stock of reserve knowledge; all that counts much is "the two great points."

Your business is always to determine what error is common and to drive ceaselessly at that. A few common names in your locality may be necessary, or a few names that are being frequently written because they occur in the books you study. I have heard of a teacher who always dictated for the last word of a spelling test the Indian name of the school in which he taught; it was known that the name would always be given, yet it was seldom that the whole class could write it correctly. A wise teacher (whose chief interest is in literature) says that he finds it good economy to spend ten minutes in getting on the board by slow degrees, with facetious comment, with repetitions and variations, the name Macaulay.

It is not a matter of commonness, but of what you find commonly misspelled. For example, in the *English Journal* for June, 1916, two teachers in two different kinds of schools testify that some of Mr. Jones's demons do not trouble them. But in general it is the same old list that is needed everywhere. There is striking proof from preparatory schools that careful teachers working quite independently will reach very similar results as to demons. It may be well to print one list, which was got up on this basis: Have we encountered a misspelling so often that it can be fairly called a demon? In case of doubt a word was excluded. A few of the forms were included more as illustrations of a type than as demonic in themselves—like *emphatically* and *delicious*. A few were due to local conditions—such as *privilege* and *tragedy*. But you can certainly

count that nine-tenths will trouble you in your first month. "Second-grade words" is used as a title for the first list simply because it is less sarcastic than "for the little ones." All but six actually are in Mr. Jones's second-grade list. "Fifth-grade" means only "not quite so childish."

SECOND-GRADE WORDS

It is *too* big	rough / enough
Their house	
I *know* the lesson	which
He *knew* it	straight
He *threw* the ball	across
The ball was *thrown*	among
He *meant* to do right	every
He *shows* good *sense*	before
He *asks* questions	once
He *turns* the crank	
He *speaks* in a *weak* voice	crowd
Tired after working	some
We got *off* the road	piece
He ought to *have* told us	believe
We *told* him	friend
Stay *there*	since
A *new* rule	stretch
Go *through* the woods	a *rough road*
They are *almost* here	*toward* the house
It is *already* five o'clock	It is *quite* cold
He *always* comes	The guide *led* us
Although I don't want to	No one *except* him
Wait *until* six	I am *sure* it is *sugar*
Speeches every *week*	Did you *lose* the money?

FIFTH-GRADE WORDS

perhaps probably sentence surprise

1

E dropped before *ing*

writing coming dining hoping

Canoeing and *shoeing* are peculiar forms

2

stop	stopped	stopping
drag	dragged	dragging
hop	hopped	hopping
slam	slammed	slamming
sin	sinned	sinning
strip	stripped	stripping
plan	planned	planning
begin	.....	beginning
occur	occurred	occurring
compel	compelled	compelling
refer	referred	referring
prefer	preferred	preferring
omit	omitted	omitting
control	controlled	controlling
roll	rolled	rolling
write	written	writing
dine	dined	dining-room
suffer	suffered	suffering
offer	offered	offering
travel	traveled	traveling
develop	developed	developing
open	opened	opening

3

try	trying	tries	tried
tie	tying	ties	tied
lie	lying	lies	*lay*

It *lay* there yesterday
It *has lain* there many days

study	studying	studies	studied
hurry	hurrying	hurries	hurried

4

Verbs in *ay*—three peculiar forms

lay	laid	lays
pay	paid	pays
say	said	says

All other *ay* verbs are regular

stay	stayed	stays
play	played	plays
delay	delayed	delays

5

Consonant before *y*

lady	ladies
story	stories
family	families

Vowel before *y*

alley	alleys
monkey	monkeys
journey	journeys
boy	boys
play	plays

6

easy	easier	easily
happy	happier	happiness
heavy	heavier	heavily
lucky	luckier	luckily
busy	business	busily

7

Adjectives like these end in *ful*

awful
painful
useful
fearful
hopeful
successful

8

Adjectives like these end in *ous*

famous	ingenious
generous	cautious
precious	delicious
conscious	religious
victorious	curious
jealous	suspicious
furious	mysterious
various	*bogus* is a peculiar form

9

dis + agree = disagree
dis + appear = disappear
dis + appoint = disappoint
dis + satisfied = dissatisfied

mis + spell = misspell
re + commend = recommend
re + collect = recollect
accommodate
committee
mean + ness = meanness
drunken + ness = drunkenness
sullen + ness = sullenness

10

No hyphens

together	nevertheless
altogether	nowhere
without	apiece
whatever	inside
wherever	outside

11

generally
really
naturally
finally
usually
accidentally
especially
formally = in a formal way
formerly = in former times
practically
artistically
frantically
enthusiastically
grammatically
sarcastically
emphatically

Publicly is a peculiar form

12

Two sep *a* rate words

all right
at last
in spite
in fact

13

Trouble with *o*

forty
prisoner
porch

lose
move
prove

14

trouble with *u*

minute
pursuit
accustomed
guard

15

Trouble with *ou*

four
fourteen
though
thorough
trouble

of course not
the ship's course
proud
cloud
loud
double

16

Trouble with *a*

separate
separation
preparation
secretary
grammar
pleasant
descendant

any
many
again
furnace
a *stationary* engine
coarse cloth
rainy *weather*
It doesn't *affect* me

17

Trouble with *e*

describe
description
biggest
greatest
enemy
destroy
despair

pretty
repetition
benefit
whether to go or not
buying *stationery*
a good *effect*
a *quiet* Sunday

18

Trouble with *i*

definite
divide
divine
privilege
view
similar

intelligent
originally
delicate
medicine
disturb

19

Possessives

a lady's hat	the ladies' hats
a fox's tail	the foxes' tails
Mr. Jones's house	the Joneses' property

the men's hats
the children's toys

its
yours
hers
theirs
whose

One *another's* burdens
Each *other's* arms
Any *one's* cap

20

An apostrophe shows that letters have been left out

have + not = haven't
did + not = didn't
are + not = aren't
was + not = wasn't
should + not = shouldn't
does + not = doesn't
we + will = we'll
they + are = they're
it + is = it's
you + have = you've
where + is = where's

21

a participle
an article
a principle
a *practical* man
the *principal* thing

22

Pronounce *brilliant ruffian; a* comes before *i* in the following:

certain
captain
villain

23

decision, occasion } one s=z omission, permission } two s's=sh

Possessive is a peculiar form

24

Queerly pronounced

Wednesday	carriage
beautiful	answer
knowledge	solemn
marriage	necessary
one woman	three women

Ought not to be queerly pronounced

government	particularly
arctic	Saturday
February	quarter
obstinate	corner

25

No extra letters

athletics
possibly
library
translate
translation
apologies
apologize

26

Single letters

around
arouse
imitate
amount
image
imagine

27

E before a suffix that begins with a consonant

nineteen
ninety
surely
safety
arrangement
sincerely
affectionately
immediately
entirely
extremely
definitely
immensely

Ninth, truly, argument are peculiar forms

Drop *e* before a suffix that begins with a vowel

lovable
immovable
desirable

Pronounce *cable gable elegance*

Notice the *e's* in the following:

noticeable changeable
unmanageable peaceable
vengeance

E is kept in order to preserve the sound of *c* and *g*
Judgment is a peculiar form

28

Double letters

supplies address
approach arrive

29

Some of the more common nouns in *el*

angel tunnel
nickel shovel
channel level

30

Words that end in *d* or *nd* have *ou*

loud found
cloud ground
proud sound

But "put the *w* in *crowd*"

31

critic opinion
criticize fascinate
criticism

32

prophet	to prophesy
a prophecy	he prophesies
two prophecies	

33

Five Wonderful Words:

goddess	comedy
shepherd	tragedy
nymph	

In two ways you will see that the list seems not to carry out what was said earlier. First, there appear to be some linkings of forms that are confused—like *brilliant* and *certain, formerly* and *formally.* This is partly for convenience in printing and partly with the hope that *brilliant* will make *villian* ridiculous (whereas *already* has no power to make *alright* ridiculous, but only to make it seem natural). Second, the list is unemphatic. This is because it is a mere record of what pupils already know. Every form has had its day or its year on the blackboard for special exposition. A noteworthy case is the six possessive forms, which represent a gory field of battle. *Fox's* will slaughter many a boy who can spell *hallucination* without a quiver; Joneses' is almost as deadly as a big howitzer. Those six forms are a whole campaign in themselves. Insist that one simple thing must be done for the singular—add *'s.* Why this is so difficult heaven only knows, but *Burns's* and *Jones's* are almost unattainable by some. Though many writers dislike the cacophony of *Williams's* and only a minority of speakers will say

Howells's novels, it is certain that modern usage prefers to print the added *s* in all cases except for the name *Jesus* and a few combinations of *sake* (*goodness' sake*). When pupils inquire, "But isn't Mr. *Jones'* house correct?" answer that it is easier and safer to follow the invariable rule; for that is the fact in school work. But you need not insist that anyone should violate his sensibility. Insist on two simple steps for the plural possessive. The first is "Get your plural." They will flinch and shy and be astoundingly timorous. But gradually they will gain courage to write *Charleses.* Then, second step, put the apostrophe after the *s,* except in a few cases where the plural does not end in *s*—such as *oxen* and *mice.*

For five years the school that prepared this list has used only the four hundred forms. It is an astonishing method. Ten years ago I should have called the man who proposed it just what you or your principal or your advisory friend will call him —a crank. It sounds preposterous, but is purely the result of experience and cannot be discredited except by somebody else's conscientious trial for five years. Month after month and year after year the pupils are put through the same familiar pages. Spellers have been abandoned. All spelling time is devoted to trying to fix common forms ineradicably. Even in this the failure is woeful. Of course it is. Improvement in spelling can be achieved only in proportion to the cube-root of the effort expended. At the end of the year only ten out of the twenty-five boys in the second-year class can spell all the words in the pamphlet. Nevertheless they are a better trained crowd than was produced by the old method.

The most hopeless spellers miss only 10 per cent of the words. After several reviews a test of thirty-five words is marked zero for two errors.

It is understood in the grading of themes and written tests that there are three kinds of misspellings: (1) unusual words, (2) words that the ideal pupil would have observed, but to which attention has not been called, (3) words that have been specially dwelt on. Nothing is deducted for the first kind, little for the second, but zero is the only limit for penalizing the third. A third-year pupil who writes *ladys* in an otherwise perfect hundred-word test may get 80 per cent in September or 40 per cent in June. For the violation of an invariable, familiar, clearly-understood rule no marking is too severe. And severity is the truest kindness. It often teaches a stupid pupil in October what leniency would leave untaught in June.

There is, I am sure, one advantage in intensive spelling that no amount of spread-out work can secure: it establishes a nucleus. When a pupil has reached the stage where *dissapoint* and *finaly* are ludicrous, where they instantly recall the teacher's invective, then that pupil is ready to be more ashamed of *transative* or to detect and reform *apropriation.* As long as he is taught that he is responsible for a vast field of seldom-used nouns he feels abused, he justifies his errors to himself; but when he is strictly liable for only a few square yards he cannot excuse himself. He is then alive to errors; which means that his intellect has been quickened. When a boy who used to look on *Macauly* with indifference has come to look upon it as an absurdity, then he has taken a most significant intellectual step.

Such advances dignify the petty and onerous teaching of spelling. And not in that homiletic sense in which we are encouraged to sweep a room as if it were God's work, but in that practical and scientific sense in which the dissection of a mosquito builds the Panama Canal. When you bring a pupil into a position where *buisness* is ludicrous, you have made him dread to be ludicrous in the case of other words; you have disclosed that pest of indifference; you are preparing for a constructive work.

Limiting the work to such a small area may seem intensive enough, yet even in this restricted space one portion is much more valuable, more difficult, and to be labored in more intensively than the rest. It is the portion that includes derived forms, like preterits and plurals. Don't think of the major part of your task as a list of words. That is what you will always be hearing and reading—how many thousand words should be in our list, or how many hundred. Even this chapter has been presenting a list. But the most limited list is still a collection of mere units. Much more important is a set of the few principles that govern common changes of form.

To illustrate. The form *stoped* is a greater evil than *seperate* because it shows ignorance of an invariable principle whose application is required several times on every theme. It means that the pupil will go *sluming* and *diping* and that he will be forever *triping* and *sliping* in a most ghastly way. *Ladys* may not be worse than *discribe,* but it means a woeful ignorance that is going to be displayed in every composition; it signifies more illiteracy, a more hopeless mental state. A *ladie's* hat certifies that the writer is grossly uneducated, while *probally*

proves no more than that he is careless. It is such always-used principles that we must drive at. *Dissapear* may be good evidence that the writer will misspell several similar words that occur once in a while; *comeing* is proof that he will misspell a hundred that occur constantly. It is these derived forms that multiply errors. When you establish such a type-form, you wipe out a whole regiment of the enemy.

The following rules and groupings are mostly familiar, but some of the hints about what to expect and how to attack may be useful.

I—AFFIXES

1. If a one-syllable verb ends in a single consonant preceded by a single vowel, double the consonant before *ed*. *Stoped* is the form that occurs ten times oftener than other failures of this class. Make pupils pronounce *hope, hoped* and then *stope, stoped,* and ask if they know what *stope* means. This is not like exhibiting such wrong forms as *wierd* and *alright,* which the pupil never sees in his reading and which the teacher ought not to show him. Correct forms like *slopped* and *sloped, lopped* and *loped* are frequently seen and have to be distinguished.

If the accent is on the last syllable of longer verbs, the situation is the same. Illustrate *occurred* by *furred.* Contrast it with *cured* and *secured. Occured* and *controled* are the common ones. Many pupils have no ear for the abstraction "accent on the last syllable," and are puzzled about *preferred* and *offered.* But if you pronounce *pré fer,* with an exaggerated emphasis, they smile at the curiosity. Then a good formula is: "*Préfered* ought to look just as

queer to your eye as it sounds to your ear." *Dinning-room* is a form that sometimes survives the most slaughterous attacks, and *writting* is very long-lived. (*Chagrined* is the only correct form of its kind.)

2. Drop a final *e* before a suffix beginning with a vowel. The instinctive dislike of doing this is very strong, so that while you very frequently see such an error as *comeing* in signs, you will probably never see *shoeing* misspelled. These *oe* verbs, and a few rarities like *dye* and *singe* (to avoid confusion) are the only ones that retain the *e* before *ing*. In England it is kept very commonly before *able*, and we all have to write *mileage* and *acreage*, but in America we consistently write *tamable, lovable*, etc. The exception is after a *g* or *c* "to preserve the soft sound." Ask how a pupil pronounces *cable* and *gable;* then force him to pronounce *peacable* and *changable*. The commonest exceptions are *ninth, truly, judgment* (almost universally printed so, despite dictionary warrant for the *e*), and *argument*. The regular ones that have to be most contended for are *surely, arrangement, immediately, definitely*.

3. Change *y* to *i* after a consonant:

(a) in plurals—*stories* (but proper names are usually not changed—*Henrys;* and there are a few abnormal forms like *stand-bys* and *drys*)
(b) in third singular—*cries*
(c) in past tense—*cried*
(d) in comparison—*happier, luckiest*
(e) in adverbs—*easily, luckily*
(f) before *ness*—*business*

Probably not more than half your class can learn that last word until they see the demonstration: *busy+ness=business.*

4. Change *ie* to *y* in *tying, lying,* etc.

5. There are three irregular preterits in *aid: laid, paid, said.* All other *ay* verbs are regular, like *stayed, delayed.* "Delay" is not a compound like "inlay," and *staid* is so unusual that a college examiner once marked it an error.

6. Three *eed* verbs: *exceed, proceed, succeed.* Others are regular, like *precede* and the noun *procedure.*

7. There are no adjectives in *full* except newly-coined, hyphenated words. They are always like *useful.*

8. Pupils use the double *l* in some common adverbs very grudgingly. The most abused are *finally, accidentally, usually,* and *really.*

9. Adjectives in *ic* have to take on an *al* before the *ly. Publicly* is an exceptional form.

10. Probably everyone in your class can spell *appoint* and knows that the common prefix is *dis,* yet a fourth of them will repeatedly misspell *disappoint* and *disappear.* The same form of emphasis is needed for *re+commend, mean+ness,* etc.

11. Usually *al* forms an adjective and *le* is a noun ending. *Principal* and *principle* look simple, but—

12. A few verbs like *mimic* and *picnic* require a *k* before *ing* to preserve the hard sound of *c.*

13. Eight common nouns ending in *o* preceded by a consonant form their plurals by adding *es: echo, hero, negro, no, potato, tomato, tornado, torpedo;* also the game of *dominoes,* usually *jingoes,* and the

Scotch *jo*. Most others must be *os*, and all others may be. The rule is usually given the other way round, but there is dictionary warrant for *os* in every case except as stated above. In all our dictionaries *os* is understood when no plural is indicated.

II—CONFUSIONS

1. *Certain, captain,* and *villain* often appear with the *i* before the *a*—and then reappear frequently after you have had *ruffian* and *Christian* exhibited.

2. There is no generalization for the *el* and *le* nouns. The best I can do is to make sure of a few common ones in *el,* heading the list with *angel.*

3. An apostrophe shows where letters are omitted; no letters are added to form an abbreviation. Could anything be simpler? Could a sensible child ever require a second caution about *e* and no *e* in *haven't* and *didn't?* He could. Many require five or ten.

4. Use no apostrophe for the possessive of a personal pronoun—*its, yours, hers, theirs. Its* is the one most commonly wrong. *Whose* is difficult for some to acquire. Indefinites (*one, another,* etc.) have the apostrophe. Be cautioned in advance about a way some children have of putting an apostrophe into a plain plural.

5. There is a strong tendency to hyphenate certain solid words, especially *together, altogether, without,* and *nevertheless.*

6. In view of what I know after eighteen years of experience I think the value of the miscellaneous hints in this paragraph is not less than twenty dol-

lars. One boy with a good mind persisted through a whole year in writing *omit* with two m's *in spelling lessons. Oppinion* is a parallel case. Boys from most cultured families will most marvelously persist in *prehaps* and *preformance.* Boys who have known *ex* and *capio* for three years will *in English* sometimes *except* an invitation. For school purposes *affect* is a verb and *effect* is a noun; never put them together for comment. "Don't despair; we can destroy the enemy" may teach three fearsome words with one effort. Avoid any exhibiting of forms that do not exist, like *diden't, captian;* it is dangerous to write *occured* or *picnicing* on the board unless they are audibly derived as strange monsters from *cure* and *ice;* if you hope to teach *angel,* do not write *angle* in that recitation. Pupils are *mentally* stone-deaf to the difference between *occasion* and *occassion, picnicking* and *picnicing;* only by forcing them to use their tongues, by making *them* say *cassion,* by insisting that they pronounce that wonderful new word *occassion,* will you get anywhere at all. A boy will calmly pronounce *picnicing* in the orthodox way; he has not felt the appeal until you make *him* say successively *ice, icing, nicing, picnicing,* or *mice, micing, mimicing;* he will balk at that last step and be unable to pronounce his own spelling. *Turnes* is not very common; *showes* is fairly frequent; *askes* flourishes in its loneliness with a vigor that you will finally learn to stand in awe of. *Supprise* has more lives than a cargo of Kilkenny cats. *Led* has no life in it; only by constant nourishment and zealous care can you keep it breathing. *Alright* is as resistless as Tammany, and for aught I can see is going to establish itself; it defines *topp*

in my German lexicon and appeared in *Scribner's* for April, 1915.

7. All displays of erroneous forms are dangerous. Wrong idioms have to be spoken and discussed, for they are often met in real life. The wrong spelling is very seldom seen in real life. Don't show it.

8. Always require the hyphens in such compound adjectives as *six-cylinder, snow-clad, easy-going.* It is marvelous to see how pupils who persistently omit this necessary link will refuse to give up the useless hyphen in *today* and will persist in *to-gether* and *with-out.* As to other compounds custom is variable; it is a matter of how old and familiar they are. *Baseball* has long been solid; *basketball* is very recent. You can find no rules and you need not worry; but encourage the hyphen, especially when the second part acts on the first (a pile-driver is for driving piles); and encourage the solid form if it is at all permissible. "Close up your compounds" is a good motto.

9. Some groups of forms cannot be reduced to a rule. There is a whole book devoted to *able* and *ible*—without any resulting formula. Until some patient genius can phrase an inclusive statement about *ance* and *ence* we must be lenient with *independance,* or depend on special emphasis for such of this class as are being used constantly. Capitalization is not worth worrying about beyond the most obvious and general rules. For example, the problem of the *h's* in "God's in His heaven" is hardly worth comment, but the *I* in "We came to an Inn" deserves censure.

10. At this point I am expected to plead for simplified spelling, but it is hard to be interested in

such a slight revolution. I have no prejudice against any amount of new forms; allow boys to amuse themselves with *thru* even if they know nothing else about reformation. But neither can I get up enthusiasm; for so few of our troubles in secondary work are touched by the proposed changes; the Board is not altering *describe* and *separate* and *too*. Their program might remove five per cent of my troubles, but might very likely add five per cent; because (here is the great point) most pupils are *almost deaf* to these phonetic differences that are as audible to philologists as the loud-sounding sea.

If thirty very familiar words are dictated for a spelling lesson, it is nonsense to mark off only five per cent for each wrong word. That would be encouraging carelessness. Ten per cent would hardly afford much discouragement. Twenty per cent is mild enough for early in the year. Nothing is too strict after several reviews. This is not harshness, however; it is true kindness; for lenient marking is like saying "Naughty, naughty!" to a burglar.

Suppose you have put a class through all these common forms by making them copy the lists from the board, keep them in a notebook, and review them several times. Then you will do well to begin a campaign of dictating sentences, for the pupil who spells *replies* in a list of twenty words may spell *replys* when his attention is distracted by ideas like this: "It is surprising how he loses his self-control. If his rich uncle asks whether the moon is made of green cheese, he blushes, hangs his head, and replies that he never was there." Use whimsical or lively or colloquial sentences. Get up little paragraphs that tell an anecdote. Read these entirely through

first, then dictate slowly in small sections. Dictation of this sort can be made to review points of idiom and punctuation.

Mark the misspelled words and return the paper. The errors must be corrected. Now, here is a small point that counts for much: Don't allow *each word* to be written out ten times. That seems not to accomplish anything. I know of a teacher's requiring a boy to write out *since* five hundred times in the afternoon—and finding that in the evening the boy had not learned how to spell *since*. Require *a list* of the misspelled words; require *this list* to be written ten times. The reason why this is a better method is (I am guessing) that when the pupil begins his second list his mind has been off on other business, has had to attend to *paid, cautious,* and *extremely*; so that when it recurs to *luckily* it has to notice all over again, has to focus once more on what has been out of sight.

Strange as it may seem, this chapter is not intended to discourage, but to furnish comfort. It is better to know what kind of difficulty we are encountering. Thor was filled with chagrin at his failure to lower a big drinking-horn; he was comforted when it was explained to him that the horn was attached to the ocean. Spelling is not a mere dish at the feast of learning; it taps the untried deeps of psychology. Don't grow black in the face and strain frantically when you find it so weirdly impossible to get rid of *dissapear*. Keep cheerful. You can get fair results with a fair amount of work.

If parents or a principal twit you because your pupils spell poorly—show them that "since" story.

Probably the next teacher you consult after read-

ing this chapter will smile and tell you that there are many spelling cranks in our profession; that the dryasdusts are by instinct insistent on this soulless littleness. But observe that my notions have been imposed by a wisdom from above. The readers of Yale entrance papers used to be instructed to condition any candidate—no matter what graces of style and appreciation he showed—if in the course of an hour's writing he had misspelled four words. Freshman themes at Illinois are conditioned for two misspellings. Those are high authorities on the essentials of an English training. Their voices must touch our trembling ears. They know what they are talking about.

CHAPTER IV

WHAT GRAMMAR IS ALL ABOUT

That closing remark about spelling is a good opening for the chapter on the most jejune of all subjects —English grammar. In 1909 the National Committee sent a questionnaire to schools and colleges, as a basis for recommendations about entrance requirements. One topic was: Shall there be a separate test in grammar? Only 45 per cent of the schools favored it, while 60 per cent of the colleges voted *aye*. This was not "Shall we have a grammar requirement?", but "Shall we have a separate test?" The college instructor who is indifferent about that kind of foundation is a rarity. If he has anything at all to do with composition, he soon finds out what mischief is caused by ignorance of the elementary anatomy of the mother-tongue. Plenty of secondary teachers are indifferent about grammar, giving only a grudging assent to a review in the first year of the high school; but the men higher up vote a heartfelt and almost unanimous *yes*.

This sort of contest about living soul-stuff and dead mind-stuff is as old as any art. But the architects and painters and musicians have been wiser than modern teachers of English. In a volume of criticism of some famous painters, written by a painter, there is little said about charm and emotion and loveliness and depth of feeling. Howells makes

a remark in some novel about the pitiful quality of this emotion-talk that a non-painter uses in commenting on a picture. No— what the professional notes is the selecting of boards, the mixing of colors, the deftness in outlining, the study of lighting and perspective. An art teacher (I speak ignorantly, but will take the hazard) insists on a foundation of anatomy and mechanical drawing and sketching dull plaster models—dry and soulless exercises. A good music teacher works with finger exercises—dry and soulless. Your architect must be drilled in stress and strain and shear, which are perfectly arid, unlovely things.

It is much more than a comparison to say: A good language teacher must lay a dry and soulless foundation. That is, considered in itself it is unlovely; considered with a view to what is to rise above, it is beautiful. Did you ever look at a great pit where an architect was basing a sky-scraper? It is ugly and joyless. But it is the only way to secure those lofty, decorative cornices.

If the teacher of any art desiccates his own soul, or if he loses sight of what lies beyond and above, or if he blinds his pupils to the real goal of endeavor—that is a sad affair. Many enthusiasts about English grammar have doubtless lost the vision. Yet even that form of earnest blindness—if the choice had to be made—is better than the effort to be artistic without cellar walls or sound notions of perspective.

The first chapter speaks about the danger of this *artistic* conception of English. We can seldom lift our eyes so high. A few boys and girls study painting or the violin because of special ambition or tal-

ent; every boy and girl must study English. We must teach such plain and fundamental stuff as all can learn. We must instruct in those mechanics which every novelist is keenly conscious of when he forms sentences (he may not have a set of names handy), which the orator felt in every period, which no builder of the lofty rhyme can disregard—and which the ordinary high-school pupil has no true perception of.

Inspiring any young spirit is so dazzling a hope that few can look at it without blinking. It is a hope that sometimes beguiles teachers into the bog of shoddy work. As a matter of fact we are safe if we take Cardinal Newman's ideal:

> I hold very strongly that the first step in *intellectual training* is to impress upon a boy's mind the idea of science, method, order, principle, and system; of rule and exception, of richness and harmony. This is commonly and excellently done by making him begin with grammar.

We discover that two practical demands are made of us. First, that we furnish a simple basis of grammatical notions on which teachers of other languages can work. This much they have a right to expect. It is a minor consideration and has little to do with determining our aims; but sometimes you will do well to find out what names and classifications are used in Latin and modern-language classes, so as not to have needless differences. The confusion in terminology used to be so great that a national committee was appointed to draw up recommendations

for uniformity. Their report,* a 60-page pamphlet, may be of some help to you if you are not perplexed by the array of formalities.

The other demand ought to underlie every plan, every detail that is taken up: Build a foundation for Composition. If this is constantly in view, you will have no fear that you are teaching a formal subject. "Formal" is the word. So damning is the epithet that some of us hardly dare mention syntax approvingly, for fear we shall be considered unfit to commune with those that are of purer fire.

We cannot do more than dimly guess what horrors would be revealed if we could gather into one report a five-minute record from every grammar recitation in the United States on a certain day. Willie in Concord would be rehearsing the quaint truth that "The definite article *the* points out one or more particular objects as distinct from others of the same kind." Susie in San Diego would briskly declare that "*Shall* and *should* are often used in the second and third persons in subordinate clauses to express volition which is not that of the subject." Perhaps thousands of children are learning the six special irregularities of weak verbs, and hundreds may be memorizing the ninety-six prepositions.

How could we expect that these crimes of pedagogy would not be committed? The rules and lists are given; they are surely not mere ornaments; there is nothing to indicate that they are for reference only; the teacher will not rashly infer that they are incitements to evil; not a hint is given that one

* It may be obtained by sending 20 cents to the secretary of the N. E. A., Ann Arbor, Michigan, for the *Report of the Joint Committee on Uniform Grammatical Nomenclature.*

page is more valuable than another. If, for example, we find twelve pages of *shall* and *would,* and one and a half pages of predicate nominative, it is a fair inference that the one subject is eight times as valuable as the other. Teachers do so understand the emphasis. They must suppose that a renowned professor has proportioned his matter according to some well-considered scheme. Indeed, the preface says that the book is "a means for continuous study." Apparently the author—and all other authors—believes that foreign plurals are as important as passive voice; and that an analysis of adverb clauses as concessive, future conditional, etc., is three times as important as the matter of whether a clause is adverbial. The exercises indicate that as much drill ought to be given on indirect questions as on nominative cases.

Yet every secondary teacher of experience knows that "continuous study" is fearfully wrong. In the first place, he suspects that such classifications as Abstract Nouns and Ordinal Numerals are of small value in themselves. He knows, in the second place, that time spent on genders and potential phrases is robbing a class of thorough instruction in fundamentals. For he realizes, in the third place, how long and hard is the process of making one grammatical truth take root. (Has any grammarian ever realized that years of repetition may not persuade a pupil to use *we shall* in the plainest of indicative statements? Not even the writers of our latest rhetoric can say *we should.)* As a teacher becomes more familiar with these rudimentary difficulties, he learns the necessity of spending more time on them, for he believes, fourthly, that they are

important. So, leaving long stretches of text quite untouched, he concentrates on rudiments. He does not pretend that his wisdom is greater than the author's, is perplexed at finding all authors against him; but the facts of his little campaign are clear before him, and without disputing the Higher Strategy he abandons it and develops his own small plans.

The criterion by which he abandons or attacks is this: Whatever seems essential in a rational program of teaching composition is to be taken up thoroughly. If our combined wisdom should finally decide that nothing grammatical really functions in the art of making good sentences, that a knowledge of syntax is not comparable to perspective in painting or to finger-exercises in music, then the study of grammar shall surely die, because it will have so little excuse for living. The question is to a certain extent debatable. I have not the least doubt that a great deal of effort as expended nowadays is a dead waste, for we don't frame sentences by grammatical analysis. But above a certain point a teacher cannot convey information about how to make good sentences or avoid poor ones unless the pupils understand syntax. It is generally believed today—I can see no possible reason for not believing—that a study of the simpler principles is necessary as a basis for rhetoric, that most matters of classifying forms are of very slight use.

The most elementary but most incorrigible error in composition is the failure to know the difference between a fraction of a sentence and two whole sentences. "No amount of ordinary correction seems sufficient to eradicate it," says the University of Illinois. The "half-sentence fault" and "comma

fault" can be almost rooted out from an entire class of pupils three years below college grade by an attack based on grammar. If it can be done otherwise—say by prolonged drill in "sentence sense" without any reference to clauses, without reference to the difference between *where* and *there, he* and *who*—then that method of success ought to be published. I have never succeeded—that is, with a whole class—except by drill in clauses. "What is a dependent clause? Like what parts of speech are clauses used?" When a pupil has finally learned to tell readily whether these groups of words are used like nouns, like adjectives, or like adverbs, he can be drilled in pointing them, will call himself stupid when he goes wrong on a theme, and will, if marked severely enough, quit one kind of half-sentence fault. A similar drill with verbals is necessary to remove another kind.

If every teacher had clearly in mind when he took up personals and relatives that his business was to undermine sentence-errors, he would know how much to skip and where to dwell. He would care nothing for gender, person, and number, for *thou wast,* for "self-pronouns." He would care much to show how a relative is dependent, how it and its clause can be removed bodily without destroying the sentence. He would be interested in nominative and objective, for he would be looking forward to the study of noun clauses, to the time when pupils should see a *that* clause as subject or object, not to be pointed even by a comma—much less by a period. His heart could firmly endure all the "formal" drill, because he would know that it was not formal at all, but was living rhetorical substance. He could have visions

of shapely sentences rising from the welter, could hear old Effectiveness blow his wreathèd horn—and would not be in the least forlorn.

Suppose that we find on a theme: "Colonel Sellers was a peculiar man, if he happened to make any money, he would immediately give it away." What appeal are we to make? Doubtless a gifted teacher of long experience, who despises "formal" grammar, can devise a way of explaining that the conditional money-making looks forward to the statement about spending, and that there are two separate statements, and that a semicolon is necessary—thus avoiding the horrid nomenclature. But he is only doing without names what we average teachers, appealing to literal minds, do with names. Grant that his result is better for the soul of a bright pupil; we have still to ask: What about the total of good to be obtained by a thousand ordinary teachers who attempt to follow him in dealing with a hundred thousand ordinary pupils? The question is of the greatest moment, yet national councils have hardly begun to ask it, and the answer will be long in doubt. My own guesses are (1) that only a small percentage of teachers make for themselves any complete explanation of what a sentence-error is, (2) that most of them have a horror of a grammatical treatment, (3) that in avoiding the clause drill they wander amid a tangle of impressionism, not guiding pupils to clear understanding. In brief: The unusual teacher's success is due (though he may not know it) to an understanding of clauses; the novice fails because he is ignorant of how to handle clauses.

The most disastrous ignorance in the realm of

clauses is a misapprehension of the nature of the so-called "connectives." A teacher who knows how to distinguish in his own practice between independent adverbs and real conjunctions, who can use semicolons with the former and commas with the latter, may never have so formulated his knowledge that he can present a scheme of it to others. He cannot find a clear analysis in any grammar. The grammatical surveys in rhetorics are misleading, indicating that the adverbs *then* and *consequently* are as subordinating as *when* and *so that*. One admirable text lumps together *yet* and *indeed* as connectives "before which a semicolon is preferable." This is just as untrue as to teach young people that sleep is "preferable" before morning and evening. Pupils must be taught that *indeed* is as independent as *it*, that *yet* is a conjunction like *but*, so that they may know assuredly that a semicolon is necessary with one word and is never essential with the other. This is the fact of normal composition in schools, just as it is the fact of a normal pupil's life that he must sleep before morning and may sleep in the afternoon if peculiar circumstances make it advisable.

I know by bitter experience how petty, how controversial, this appears to artistic minds. A dozen times since I began this chapter I have thought, "What's the use? You might as well try to interest this inexperienced teacher in the rat-proofing of New Orleans." And that very simile has given me heart to take up the pen again. For diseases that waste our national vigor can be contended against only after some dirty-aproned physician has dissected *rattus* or *stegomyia*. My laboratory may smell of dead *yets* and *indeeds*, but I verily believe that they

are the carriers of dread contagion, and that if we know about them we shall give up exorcism and fumigation, and shall gain health and prosperity by exterminating pests. Half the college students in the country are debilitated in their sentence-making organ. Is this a visitation of divine wrath? an undiagnosable illness? a "miasma" against which we should burn sulphurous wrath? or an unescapable contagion which we ought to alleviate by a diet of literary ambrosia? My test-tubes assure me that the plague is directly traceable to a bacillus, *ignorantia grammatica.* I have demonstrated it on tens of thousands of themes; it always breeds true; its presence in a human brain always develops sentence-errors; when it is removed from a pupil, he no longer writes sentence-errors. My anti-toxin is not a panacea. It no more produces graceful sentences than any specific remedy causes general bodily vigor. It does no more than rid the system of one malady.

I have no recipe for increasing the mental robustness of the race. Just as it may be true that our average of physical fitness has been lowered by artificial aids against disease, so it may be true that the injection of grammatical accuracy results in the ultimate weakening of esthetic vitality. I have never observed the least indication of such after-effects, nor can I conceive that they will occur. But that point is not here at issue. Nor are we debating whether sentence-errors really signify in the sight of Heaven. To me personally the difference between a comma and a semicolon is less than nothing. I only feel that if a youth is *unable* to grasp the distinction he is mentally unworthy of a diploma—or

else his teacher is unworthy of a salary. I note that the colleges and tax-payers demand that such knowledge shall be imparted, and that we are not meeting the demand successfully. What follows is not a symposium of heart-throbs, but a method of deserving a hundred dollars a month.

An inevitable cry of dismay must be forestalled: "Oh, this is an apotheosis of drugs! This will encourage novices to herd their pupils out of the pleasant pastures and confine them amid antidotes and syringes." Peace! No medical thesis ever turned a lover of green fields into a worshiper of microbes. Anyone who can be turned from the paths of good sense by this chapter is already unfit to teach English.

One principle is to be forever in mind: Pupils must know what words *do* in sentences. That "Colonel Sellers was a peculiar man, if he happened to make money" will illustrate. What does *if* do? It joins its clause to *would give.* A pupil who has been taught to find out instantly what *if* does is prepared to understand why the comma before it is the saddest of blunders. *Logically* the comma is right, because what follows is subordinate in thought, explaining how the Colonel was peculiar. The Frenchman may indicate this subordination by a comma. We are not allowed to. Another illustration is "A plague upon them, they're rotten." Unless a person knows how *plague* is used there is no way to inform him that a mere comma is not acceptable after *them.* Our pointing in such cases depends upon grammatical dependence or independence. And those arbitrary syntactical distinctions are never revealed by any amount of drill

in such mental states as "non-committal present conditional."

In its normal use *if* is always a conjunction, but we should discredit the notion that a word is anything in itself. The letters *t, h,* and *e* sometimes form an adverb and sometimes an article. To teach that "*concerning* may be classed as a preposition" is to damage the youthful mind, because it conveys the impression that a word is something in itself; whereas it really is a preposition if it does prepositional work. "What does it do? Then what is it?" Any deviation from this line of attack is turning a poor child's logic topsy-turvy. To expound "infinitive clauses" or "infinitives as modifiers" or "intransitive passive" (sic) is to double on our own tracks, eluding and baffling the pupil. Very few English forms are anything in themselves. *Asked* is nothing till you know what it does, *but* must be seen in action, *to sleep* is probably not an infinitive—and so on forever. There is hardly such a thing as an intransitive verb. I read in my text that "Roared what?" would be an absurdity, but Shakespeare made somebody "roar these accusations forth." To classify *roar* as intransitive and then to say "here used transitively" is to spoil our own efforts. "What does it do? Then it is transitive here."

This truth about verbs is hardly credible to some persons of middle age who were brought up with texts modeled after the Latin, for in Latin a verb is usually transitive or intransitive in itself; it is that kind of verb. Reference to dictionaries is deceptive because they seem to announce that a verb is by nature one kind or the other. But try to find a dozen verbs that are not entered as both transitive

and intransitive. Such lugged-in Latin notions originally distorted our texts and are still potent causes of misstatement and wrong emphasis. The treatment of mood has been a process of forcing square English facts into round Latin holes. Think of defining case of English nouns as "variation in form." Even the great and sensible Mätzner devoted pages to the genders of our nouns, yet gender hardly exists in English. Since Latin grammars display elaborate schemes of conjugation, our grammars have done the same; we have paraded principal parts and declensions and all manner of paradigms as if English forms were unknown and our task was to commit them painfully to memory. Every pupil has known the forms all his life. What he does not know is how to describe the functions of words.

Not all classification of forms is worthless, but learning about kinds is of small value compared with learning about functions, and the difficulties of teaching a few necessities of syntax are so great that no ordinary school has time for anything more. Not one of us realizes how hard it is to make a whole class able to distinguish between subject, object, and predicate nominative. Scores of times I have seen normally bright pupils in a third year of review tripping over "up flew the windows" or learning all over again why a gerund is not a participle.

What are those few necessities? We might almost reply, "Whatever will explain clauses." You can never know the nature of clauses until you understand the uses of nouns, adjectives, adverbs, and relative pronouns. You cannot tell a clause from an independent sentence until you have studied personals. You cannot know about nouns and pronouns

except in connection with transitive and intransitive verbs. Phrases will always be clauses until you study prepositions. Clauses will never be clauses until you investigate conjunctions. And there you are. Through every inch of the drudgery you can see clauses. Familiarity with them will breed some ease in writing complex sentences, and so make style less childish. Knowledge of them will put counterfeit sentences out of circulation. In your toiling with subject and object you have a purpose, a prevision of how you are going to destroy such monsters as "What you say, doesn't count, it's what you do." Ellipses are not futile puzzles if you are providing against "Why not, there's no danger." You can even behold above the meanest adverb a light which shall show young intellects why they must not let a weak adverb clause stand all alone between periods.

What have you supposed you were going to do? Raise a dust for no particular purpose? If you know that every motion is going to help the next generation to command a more decent style, shan't you feel that your occupation is less like devilish goose-stepping and more like godly labor?

Your year's course begins with recognizing the parts of speech. They are not meaningless counters, but parts of a vital physiology. Definitions are merely brief statements of uses: a word used as a name, a word whose business is to modify nouns and pronouns, a word that has power to make a statement. Then you take up each in turn. Disregarding such relativities as "cognate object", "object of service," you attend only to real uses—subject, vocative, indirect object, adverbial objective. In themselves these topics are exactly as inspiring as

a heap of bones; but a good physician can see all the way from the power of naming bones to the power of saving lives. Verily so can you if your eye is not dim. When Thomas learns that *Royal George* is not the object of *down went,* and then for three successive weeks hears that *Barbara Frietchie* is not the object of *sprang,* a wonderful conception begins to grow in Thomas's mind: "I needn't begin every sentence of my own with the subject." Incidentally he will be prepared to adopt such conventions as using commas with vocatives or appositives, and not using them before objective predicates.

Must we hack our way through all these constructions? Probably yes—alas! Why? Because unless Thomas is responsible for every use he will not understand you some day when he has written "The Judge was tall, dark-brown hair," or "When a boy is seriously hurt in football, even a broken arm or leg." You will point reproachfully at *hair* or *arm* and ask its construction; he will reply, "I guess that's one you didn't teach us."

Accept any explanation that could possibly be deduced by a rational process. In "It cost a dollar" the noun might be called adverbial. And keep in mind always that the analysis which long habit makes obvious to us is essentially hard. Can you present off-hand an irresistible demonstration of the antipodal functions of the two following verbs? "She seems a goddess", "She resembles a goddess."

Thence to those words that take the place of nouns. All the parade of "compound", "demonstrative", "indefinite," is a show of phantoms, only to be glanced at. "What do they do?" Just what nouns do—except those relatives. Everything about

pronouns is too easy, too vacuous to spend effort on compared with those relatives. They are weak by nature, small, parasitic, unable to stand alone. They can be graphically charted by writing them in very small letters on a line slanting down from a big antecedent. This is not kindergartening; it is a primal fact about sentences. If a child establishes the mental habit of drawing a ring about a relative clause, he can always corral his relative constructions; if he has formed no such habit, he will be forever turning loose upon society such mavericks as "I have something here that as long as I keep it, I'll be unhappy." Nor have I observed that such a sense of restraint ever stiffened a lively style in the least. Would Stevenson have been more charming if he had allowed his clauses to stampede? You will never waste time by additional exercises in relatives, for no class ever knew them infallibly. It is doubtful whether you should touch upon relatives as descriptive and restrictive. The distinction is the most delicate and difficult in the whole field of rhetoric, the hardest to formulate, the hardest for illiterate minds to grasp. It must be mastered before clauses can be properly pointed, but "touching upon" will accomplish nothing. Unless you can present it fully, you had best not take it up at all. It is a rhetorical distinction.

As you have had nothing to do with "adjective pronouns," so you will not speak of "pronominal adjectives." We must play no game of now-you-see-it-and-now-you-don't. By their functions ye shall know them. With the exception of possessives. To call these adjectives might help modern-language instructors, but it is doubtful whether we can afford

to do so; for it creates the contradiction that possessive nouns are nouns, but that possessive pronouns are adjectives. And consistency is precious in elementary grammar. We must advance consistently to participles. If you realize that they are the goal, and that a knowledge of them will prevent sentence-errors, you can handle adjectives with zeal.

In adverbs a definition will be useful. (You will find that occasionally adverbs really modify prepositions and conjunctions: "*right on* that spot, standing *just where* he told us.") You will feel very little interest in the different kinds of meanings, or in irregular comparisons, or *yes* and *no,* or expletive *there,* or uses of the superlative. You are concerned with "What is it doing?" You will wish you could tear out that leaf that tells about "relative adverbs," for it exposes a child to the plague, abuses and misleads him. They are conjoining words. Interrogative adverbs are adverbs.

The ideal text would alternate lessons in verbs and constructions of nouns, for they are inseparable matters. You must join what the text has sundered. Four-fifths of your time on verbs will be spent in distinguishing betwen intransitive and passive, object and predicate nominative; one-fifth on all other matters. For sequence of tenses in composition will never be influenced by parsings, and subjunctive mood is not defined alike by any two grammarians. A statement or question of fact is indicative, a command is imperative, a mere condition of mind is subjunctive—no more but so. And be willing to leave mood quite untaught until you have made doubly sure of the necessities.

Prepositions—what delight have they promised

you? You can find them almost inspiring if you anticipate coherent modifiers and the clearer notions of clauses. A phrase is always a clause to Thomas, and until he can distinguish you have no language by which to explain some matters of arranging, varying, and pointing. It is not that grammar makes good sentences, but that it makes possible the communicating of ideas about forming sentences. So your object is to delimit prepositions from adverbs on the one hand and conjunctions on the other. They always have objects, never modify anything, but form phrases that modify. *Like* is not "an adjective used like a preposition"; it is a preposition. You never weary of inquiring what the object is and what the phrase modifies. And you look into the seeds of time and see an epoch when "in which he sat in" will be monstrous, and when a phrase will not be a sentence.

There is a sense in which all this study is preliminary to conjunctions, for conjunctions mean clauses, and clauses mean the approach—as near as mechanics can go—to decent sentences. Your energy will all be directed at "What does it do?" One form of answer, one invariably, must be insisted on; any other will leave the class in a haze: "It attaches its clause to *one word.*" It may join a modifier or an object, but only when we know to what *one word* and for what purpose can we answer "Then what kind is it?" *When* and *where* are no guarantee of what the clause is. "How is the clause used?" In "Use such powers as you have" *as* joins a clause to the adjective *such*; therefore the clause is adverbial, no matter what your text declares. It is doubtful whether *as* must ever be called a relative pronoun.

There is in your text a section which ought to be excised by a national board of censorship. Some day it will be. It is that paragraph which asserts that some adverbs are conjunctions. *Still* is not a conjunction. *However* is not a conjunction—never in a secondary school. Nor is *nevertheless* nor *moreover* nor *then*. If this dictum is a flat denial of the whole thesis, then the thesis must go to smash. We face an ugly, illogical fact, a social taboo that is superior to all reason. The fact of custom is that we do not point these words with commas as we do *though* and *unless*. We place a deadly entanglement in the path of progress if we so much as whisper the possibility that these independent adverbs might in any event ever conceivably be called conjunctions. No, we must shout the contrary. And as we vociferate we may see opening before us a highway of real sentences on which pupils may safely travel to that Promised Land in which there are no sentence-errors.

A verbal used like an adjective is a participle; a verbal used like a noun is an infinitive. That ought to be the limit of definition, but unfortunately a National Committee asks us to call *ing* infinitives gerunds. So be it, then. But assure your class that the difference is purely formal, that you are dissecting only adjective uses and noun uses. Never swerve from that. Never use the confusing "participial infinitive" nor "infinitive clause" nor "infinitive modifiers," nor "complementary" nor "purpose"; spend little time on phrases, tenses, or "pure adjective." Drive at "Is it noun or adjective?" Every infinitive is used like a noun: "complementary" is a direct object; "purpose" and "modifier" are

objects of *to*, and *the phrase* modifies. "Every participle must modify something. What is it? Why, then, is it dangling helpless in your sentence?"

There is the program—to deal with no mere forms, to ask what words do, to keep before us the vision of better sentences.

A text to put this into effect would have quite a different appearance from our present grammars. It would do in form what most experienced teachers do in practice: offer hardly any text, offer a thousand sentences to work with. Its few simple definitions would be mere titles for colloquial comment on a few principles. The comments would be brief, serving only to introduce the illustrations. And the illustrations would be nothing but introductions to the only part that counts—exercises. Probably nine-tenths of the book would be sentences so grouped as to afford easy preliminary drill on one topic, then on two topics mingled, every exercise including some sentences that contain no illustrations of the topic. This is not a policy of puzzles; it is insurance against heedlessness—a highly important bit of tactics. The sentences would be taken mostly from stories and descriptions, so that they should seem human, somewhat interesting, and so that their meaning should be obvious at first reading. We cannot reckon how unreal we have made grammar with our selections from Tennyson and Emerson. (And possibly have done something toward making literature odious.) It is more profitable to examine a live idiom like "I don't know who did it" than to whirl toward Azrael's outposts with "As night to stars, woe lustre gives to man."

Does it sound like a program of easy incomplete-

ness? It would be quite the contrary. For it is harder to be thorough in a few fundamentals than to hurry through a thousand non-essentials; more complete to know all of something than to know only a little about some things.

Does it sound like a great lot of work for a small result? It is true in one way that a year of drill in syntax does not furnish much useful knowledge; many a skilful writer who in the truest sense understands his mother-tongue knows nothing of grammatical formulas and would not have his skill perceptibly increased by a course in syntax. Grammar drill actually counts for very little in training a pupil to use the language correctly, for there are very few opportunities (like "if I'd have known" or "between you and I") to appeal to reason. It is a fact that though a man has all knowledge of diagraming clauses, so that he can analyze unfalteringly the maziest sentence of Pater or James, he may nevertheless be unable to compose one interesting period. In spite of the various hints given above as to how grammar may be applied for obviating careless constructions, it must be admitted that such applications come only now and then, could be made without all the preparatory analysis. Grammar probably trains the intellect no better than a dozen other subjects that have greater cultural content. What on earth does grammar do? It prepares a pupil to learn when he has reached the end of a sentence and to be instructed in punctuating that sentence. Is that a small result? It must look positively tiny to you; it appears insignificant to some experienced educators. That is because you measure size astronomically. To an astronomer the solution of a quad-

ratic equation is an achievement about the size of a pea; to a grade pupil it is larger than the moon. The child is trained for years, slowly advanced from one simplicity to another, before he can begin algebra. Some day the world will realize that we have been regarding the solution of written-sentence formations from the astronomer's view-point, have been, as it were, taking subtraction for granted and merely glancing at decimals. As a result our children have only the dimmest notion of what a sentence is; the children become youths in high school, and still have the dimmest notion of what a sentence is; here they are exercised in the higher calculus of English without knowing what plain quadratics are; and half of them proceed to college quaternions before some sensible director of freshman composition requires them to learn why x^2+y^2 cannot be factored. As Professor Thomas of Minnesota says about ordinary college freshmen: "They have been left in total ignorance of the nature of a sentence. . . . The whole theory of punctuation still remains in worlds beyond their ken." Freshman instructors at Williams have to devote the first weeks of the college year to drill in the rudiments of punctuation. And punctuation cannot be taught without a knowledge of clauses.

If quadratics is a "small" result in mathematics, so is a knowledge of clauses "small" in English. Not otherwise.

CHAPTER V

TEACHING GRAMMAR

One precept must be graven in your mind: Nothing is true simply because your text says it is true. A marvelous collection could be made of untruths that have been solemnly rehearsed from one generation to another. One example is Dr. Johnson's guess that "had rather" is a vulgarism—an absolute falsity that lived unresisted for a century and a quarter, has been thirty years a-dying, and is not dead yet. Only five years ago an *Atlantic* contributor inveighed against the ignorance of an age which had no more feeling for grammatical propriety than to use "no one but me." She *argued* that "me" was wrong. All such things-that-aren't-so arise from logical brains that argue. Grammar admits of no argument—at least Professor Whitney convinced most thinking Americans that it doesn't; and since his time a host of thinking professors have been beating into us the notion that reasoning about grammar is an utterly fatuous futility. Perhaps you have some conceptions about this or that usage as wrong "because." You will constantly encounter prepossessions against respectable idioms "because" of some ratiocination. The only way to know about respectability is to know the facts of usage—has it been, or is it now, commonly employed by educated people?

English grammar is always furnishing surprises, things you never thought of before. If you teach it twenty years, you will not get entirely beyond the

unexpected. But the great body of usual explanations is not hard to acquire. The best guide for teachers that I happen to know is *Grammar and Its Reasons* by Mary H. Leonard. It is clear, sensible in its methods, remarkably complete, and always sound. The most thorough and reliable text is Whitney's *Essentials of English Grammar,* which, though designed as a textbook, is really a manual crammed full of information for the teacher. Kittredge and Farley's *Advanced English Grammar,* though misleading in some of its statements, records some facts of idiom that other authors have been too timorous to include. Armed with these three volumes you can bag almost any idiom that rears its fearsome head. Should you by any strange chance ever wish to go further in quest of facts from our literature, use Mätzner's three-volume *Grammatik.* Even if the German comment is hard to read, the great stores of quotations are easy—and they are what counts. Otto Jespersen's volumes of syntax (in English) will be another tremendous collection of quotations, very originally and entertainingly grouped. It may be many years before this is completed; the first volume (1914) does not cover much of the field.

English constructions are hard to reduce to an orderly scheme. After a person has been arranging and explaining them for five years he is astonished to find unsolved perplexities confronting him every year for the next five. They are specially numerous in common idioms and colloquial language. Be prepared to be "stuck" at any time. It is fatal to pretend knowledge, because you may make a pronouncement that will later be disastrous. The best way out

is: "I've never thought of that. I want to make sure. I'll tell you tomorrow." If in the rush of a recitation you make a ruling that later recoils upon you and shows that you were wrong, acknowledge it. Get straight again. There is no other way to keep the respect of the class. But of course you must display as little ignorance as possible. Often you can see the trouble coming and can avoid the encounter. Often the puzzle is of no value to the class, and you can say that you are omitting the oddities. Try to have it understood from the beginning that English syntax is not like arithmetic: a teacher of other subjects knows an answer to every question that can arise; in every elementary grammar there are questions that lexicographers cannot agree about.

At many points in the course there will be options as to how you classify or explain. Make it clear to the class that some of the schemes are arbitrary, that the matter is handled otherwise in other books or other schools, but that for the sake of uniformity it is necessary to require some one scheme with any one class. Always try to give credit for, or at least to excuse, a recitation that shows an analysis which might have been taught somewhere in the world. Sensible headwork, even if the result is laughable, is better than mere devotion to an arbitrary standard. If a pupil says that *trotting* in "he went trotting along the sidewalk" is a modifier of *went,* this is a notion that has reality in it; it is not to be condemned unless it conflicts with a standing, invariable ruling that participles never modify verbs. The word really does convey the impression that he went "in a trotting fashion"; it may truly be called adverbial. But we get a clearer, more consistent

outline of English syntax if we insist that participles are always used like adjectives, and that hence *trotting* is a form of predicate adjective after *went.*

This is one of hundreds of examples of how hard it is to frame a plain and consistent outline in which the "always" is not to be continually criss-crossed by the "sometimes, however." That undeviating outline is really a necessity. It does not narrow you or your subject or the pupil; it is simply the skeleton of the Generally True; it is the support for grammatical concepts. When it is mastered—and not before—a pupil is entitled to debate of might-bes and in-realities. You and the pupils will keep in a much happier frame of mind if you recognize that the stiff outline is a useful device, not a subject or an end in itself.

The actual work with miscellaneous sentences is all that really counts. You need hundreds of them. Sometimes you will be driven to the use of other books for material, such as a history or even an algebra or the Bible. Copious exercises is the word.

A natural approach is to take a preliminary survey of the different parts of speech in this order: nouns, pronouns, adjectives, verbs, adverbs, prepositions, conjunctions. It may be well to leave infinitives and participles till later. This kind of work goes swimmingly. When the lesson is all about adjectives it is easy to select them. Even long verb phrases can be picked out handily when the lesson is all about verbs. Be warned that this is mere seeming, and that when you mix things up the class will seem to have got nowhere at all.

"A pronoun is a word used in place of a noun."

Very well. Then the italicized words in the following are pronouns: "*Each* had his knapsack", "*One* never knows his own faults." Next we learn that "An adjective is a word that modifies a noun or pronoun," and we tackle the sentence: "Each man ran for the other side." Since we are concentrating on adjectives, we shall probably get fair results with *each* and *other*. But now we review a mix-up of pronouns and adjectives, encountering: "Each one had thought the others were lying about that other boat." Protests will be heard. "Yesterday we called *each* a pronoun." "The book says that *each* is a pronoun."

You think that you will drive them to cover thus: "Yes, but what is a pronoun? How is *one* used? It doesn't modify some understood noun, does it? You couldn't say 'each one *man*,' could you? No. So it stands for a noun, then? Exactly. And what is a pronoun? Then *one* must be a pronoun? What does *each* do? Modifies *one*. Any word that modifies a pronoun is a—what? So *each* is an adjective."

Isn't it easy? It is also easy to go through the rigmarole tomorrow, and next week, and next month. I have known bright boys to need a repetition after five months of almost daily megaphoning the same old idea. It seems a notion contrary to normal mental processes. A spade is a spade. If you use it for poking the fire it doesn't become a poker. A word ought in the nature of things to be something. This calling it one thing today and another tomorrow is not fair.

How is it used in the sentence? Start out strong with that, and never let up. If a pupil, unprompted, by good headwork, argues that *one* modifies an

understood noun, and so is an adjective, he ought to be commended. It could be so classified and taught. Even in the case of *others,* where an *s* is added that never is added to an adjective, it is better—early in the course, that is—to commend for a piece of real reasoning than to discredit for not taking the *s* into account. But when your system has been clearly announced, made clear by practice, then the reasoner must bow to the needs of uniformity.

You come to adverbs. "An adverb is a word that modifies a verb, an adjective, or another adverb." Shortly you come upon: "He got almost into port." The pupil reciting finds no adverb, and argues that *almost* modifies *into,* which is neither verb, adjective, nor adverb. Give him a cheer. A more stupid child could have guessed that *almost* modified *got.* The fact is that we really feel that it was "almost into," and not "almost got." I think the definition needs extension.

It is as hard to define a preposition as to state formally which your right hand is, yet it is almost as easy to distinguish between an adverb and a preposition as between right and left. A preposition is suspiciously like an adverb; it indicates time, place, etc., but it always has an object: "That was just *like* him", "I sat *next* the door." It is well to insist that a preposition never modifies anything; it is the prepositional *phrase* that modifies.

A preliminary skirmish with conjunctions is bound to be unsatisfactory. The coördinating kind are easy, but the subordinating—those connectives that join clauses to single words—are a large subject and are not apprehended until after a good deal of work with clauses—of which more anon.

The "first time over" work you must make clear to the class is just such a general glance as a stranger in a big city might take by long street-car rides, or an explorer would try to get from some high hill. You could learn more rapidly about a maze of streets or a jungle if you first got a general idea of the lay of the land.

One text, by an able man, proceeds from general notions of subject and predicate to particular syntax. Some able men do not believe in diagraming. Hardly one point in this chapter but is controverted or differently handled by a longer experience than mine. You will every week be forming convictions as to how you will go to work another year. That is right. But refuse to be guided by theories of what ought psychologically to be the best methods. Nothing is so false as a theory of how minds may be expected to work; nothing is so true as sympathetic observation of how they actually have struggled, of how this pedagogic trick got results and that one failed.

The following job lot of comments, cautions, and tactics is selected on the basis of: What did I least understand when I began to teach?

The most literate young mind I ever tried to instruct—it read Chaucer late at night and it wrote masterful themes—could not be securely taught in a whole year of grammar drill the difference between a direct object and a nominative after *to be*. I shouted, "You cannot have an object of *is*," and whispered dramatically, "There is no such thing as an object of *was*." Even dull boys in the class learned to snicker with anticipatory pleasure if this lad was called on to give the construction of the noun in "This might have been a palace." To the end

he never really conceded that the nouns after *became* and *had been called* were not objects.* I know a bright fellow who only four years before he became a teacher in a good preparatory school was still prone to put an accusative after *sum*. Every fall we have a class of small boys (corresponding to the eighth grade) who are vigorously bombarded from the outset by forewarned teachers, both of Latin and English, with the refrain, "There is no such thing as an object of *esse*", "*To be* never can take an object." We look forward with assurance to the necessity of keeping up the fire for months. This is an unco thing in pedagogy. There must be a better way to teach predicate nominative. If you can discover the way, you will benefit mankind.

That word after the verb always looks like an object. "Up flew the windows." The best formula to rescue *windows* from that secret power that "flew" them is to insist on answering the question, "Who or what flew?" Insist that before a pupil recites (it requires only a second or two) he shall ask himself the question, "Who or what——?" If you are told that in "Down sank the Royal George" *Royal George* is the object of *sank*, put your informant through this catechism: "What question did you ask yourself? Well, who or what did sink? Then what is the subject of *sink*? Then in what case is *Royal George*?" If you keep unflaggingly at this, you will be doing more for that group of young brains than merely showing them about a subject nominative.

Nominative absolute (as in "the weather being

*(Don't infer from that masterful theme-writer's case that grammatical training is not of value for composition. Suspend judgment.)

fine") can be handled with double effect after some study of participles. It is doubtful whether it should be taken up before.

The possessive as an object of *of* ("that whim of my father's") is a queer thing. Announce that it is queer. For once the object of a preposition is not in the objective case.

The clue to an indirect object is that it expresses "to or for whom" without a preposition. If "he handed me the card," *me* is an indirect object; if "he handed the card *to me*," *me* is the object of *to*. This is confusing to children who have been studying the Latin dative.

An objective predicate ("They made him king") always occurs with a direct object, showing what that object was made to be, was called, etc.

An adverbial objective ("We walked a mile") is usually a measure. "Do it some other *way*" is another species. Consider the two cases: "We weighed a pound of sand", "The sand weighed a pound." In the first the *pound* is being weighed; in the second *pound* merely shows how much.

An appositive is " set alongside a noun or pronoun to explain it"; it is usually set off by commas; it is "adponoed" to that other noun or pronoun.

Personal and demonstrative pronouns give no particular trouble, except for the two peculiar uses of *it*. Expletive *it* is a dummy subject; the real subject lurks on the other side of the verb. Impersonal *it* has no conceivable antecedent; there is no other subject. The only kink with interrogatives is, "You can't know the construction until you have put the question into the form of a statement." "Who are you?" becomes "You are who." Then

we see that "*who* is the object of *are*," and are later led to see that it is predicate nominative.

But relatives! Suppose yourself, in a rather embarrassing situation in which you are anxious to appear to advantage, confronted with this demand: "Form a congeries of postulates so arranged that number two, in which number one is involved in a limiting capacity, shall be involved in a limiting capacity in number three, which is to be uninvolved." There is nothing hard about that, because you have a complete set of linguistic notions into which you can promptly transpose these not unusual terms and, unless you are pitifully flustered, can fulfill the demand in an instant. Yet the scholastic intangibility of it, if you can imagine it thrust upon some mature mind that had educated itself without knowledge of dependent clauses, may feebly illustrate the lack of appeal which "relative clause" makes to the average fourteen-year-old boy.

Draw a picture for him. It was in my third year of teaching that I rushed to the board, in a desperate mood, wrote in huge letters "THE MAN HAS GONE," and then, inside a loop connected to *man,* wrote in small letters "*who was here.*" There was a graphic exhibit of the bigness and independence of the main clause, and the small, adjectival bondage of the relative clause. I have used it ever since.

This, like other eccentric schemes suggested in these pages, may not appeal to you. A man to whom I am much indebted once told me of a device which did not strike me favorably. I can't use it. But I should certainly have taken it up—should have taken up anything—if I had not had another.

Keep constantly before the class the essential idea that a clause contains a subject and verb, and is used like a single adjective, or a single adverb, or a single noun; that relative clauses are adjective clauses, because they are always attached to, always modify, some noun or pronoun. Whenever you can make a pupil perceive this clearly you have conferred upon him a priceless gift—a bit more courage in tackling Shakespeare's sentences.

You will moil in vain in the opening days with relatives unless you follow the plan (or its equivalent in some shape) of "picking out the relative clause." "What is the clause?" must be the unfailing question. Consider "He who hesitates is lost." The *he* and the *who* are forever going to be entangled until the pupil learns to "take that clause out of the sentence," and to put it one side, like a dissected organ, and then—never till then—to examine its functions. At first your class will dig out "who hesitates is" and hold it up, all dripping, for scrutiny. Insist that we must have only one leg—not a leg+half a body. Which is, being interpreted, one subject and one verb, with their modifiers. (Or at first you may practice on bare subject and verb.)

When this dissection can be performed, then you may unfold the precious truth that the construction of a relative is always found *in its clause,* never is mixed in the least with any shred of the sentence outside that clause. After driving this home you may cautiously take the next step: A relative's gender, person, and number are always found entirely *outside* of the clause—i. e., they depend on the antecedent.

A pupil can decide whether *that* is a relative by

finding out whether it makes sense to substitute *who* or *which*. So far as I know it is never safe to trust him to decide in any other way.

Relatives always seem to a class to be in apposition with the antecedents. The answer is that they are not "put alongside of in the same construction," but are subjects or objects, are not in any sense appositives.

Have nothing to do with sub-classes of adjectives. The use of classifying at all (and the same is true of adverbs) is slight. But it is necessary to get at the distinction between an adverb and a predicate adjective. If you are discussing "The heavens grew dark," don't argue that "*dark* is an adjective." *Dark* is nothing *per se*. How is it used? It doesn't describe the way in which the heavens grew; they didn't grow in a dark manner. They grew *to be dark*. So of *seem, appear, look, become,* etc.

Waste no energy over such a retained preposition as "This is being talked about." Never allow it to be called a part of the verb phrase; if it must be spoken of, it is more like an adverb—it has no object. Reserve your time and energy for the obvious prepositional use in "*What* are you talking about?"

Transitive and intransitive is one of the three decisive battles of grammar. It is so bound up with predicate nominative that it is a good plan to sandwich the two topics. The worst cause of stumbling is the definition, often taught in schools, that a transitive verb is one which takes an object. Excommunicate it. Pronounce a formal anathema against the cursed thing. A transitive verb *in the active voice* always has an object, but never allow the matter of "an object" to be associated with "transi-

tive." I keep the following scheme on the board every day and require the class to refer to it as they recite:

Transitive
  active—always an object.
  passive—subject is acted on, no object.
Intransitive
  subject acts, but there is no object.
  No Voice.

Grammarians regularly speak of intransitives as active, but this is so confusing in elementary work, so destructive of the very distinction we are erecting, that it is best to insist on "has no voice" for class work.

An active verb is considered a normal, decent kind. Passives and intransitives are confused. The steps to take in every approach are:

(1) What is the subject? All is hopeless guesswork without this beginning.

(2) Is the subject acting, or being acted on?

(3) If it is acting, is there an object?

Don't analyze verb phrases into component parts. In "This might easily have been sooner finished" *might have been finished* is the verb.

Attack the conjugations thus: Apply the three following tests; if any one fits, the verb is regular; if no one fits, it is irregular. (1) The past tense ends in a *d* or *t* which is not in the present (*made, had, brought*). (2) The principal parts are the same throughout (*hit*). (3) The vowel is merely shortened in the past (*bleed*). The subject is a non-essential, not worth going into detail with; but the general notion is useful.

Subjunctive mood really exists in English in a few

formal or archaic uses like "if it were", "may it be", "though he have." These are real variations in form to show that the verbs express mere condition of thought. Beyond this there is only a welter of subtleties, a flux of contradictory opinion. If left to your own devices, have nothing to do with anything but the few realities. If you are required to teach subjunctives, stick to one simple formula: Does it clearly indicate a mere condition of thought? Many cases are debatable; there are fewer subjunctives than you may suppose. Probably the following are indicative: "I could have shot it with perfect ease" (=the fact is that I had power to), "I may be wrong about this" (=the fact is that there is such a possibility), "Perhaps you would like to stay" (=the fact perhaps really is that). The following would usually be called subjunctive, because they clearly show, or the context shows, that the verb is not indicating a fact: "If only I could have shot it", "I might have gone to bed sooner", "Wouldn't he have enjoyed that!" Few will ever object to your method if you limit subjunctives to: (1) real subjunctive by its form, (2) mere prayerful hope or exhortation that does not sound the least like fact, (3) a condition that is clearly a case of speaking about what would be true if the facts were otherwise.

Infinitives and participles must come last, because they are resemblance-words, with no new characteristic of their own; and work with them is really impossible until their prototypes are understood. They are words derived from verbs, having all the powers except the great one of making a statement, and used like nouns and adjectives.

Any verbal used like a noun is an infinitive: *to*

do, doing, to have been done (unless you decide to distinguish gerunds). The essential of all drill with infinitives is to explain their constructions as nouns. "Complementary" is worse than nothing in English grammar. "Used like an adjective" (as in "the thing to do") is a sledge-hammer for battering the foundations you have so laboriously laid. An infinitive is always a kind of noun. These so-called adjectival and adverbial uses can always be explained as phrases in which the root infinitive is the object of *to*. The working formula for pupils is: Does it make fairly good sense to substitute *for* and the *ing* form? "That is a queer thing to do" becomes "That is a queer thing for doing"; "He went to die for his country" becomes "He went for dying, for the purpose of dying." This analysis is likely to become a favorite—it is so easy. It must not be allowed unless it can be defended by getting a "fairly sensible" result. Don't accept this "object of to" analysis when another kind is possible. In "It seems queer to have been loafing here all summer" *to have been loafing* is the real or "logical" subject of *seems*. In "He is to die in the morning" *to die* may be called a predicate nominative.

All grammars discuss "subject of the infinitive," and most are partial to it. I refused to teach it for many years, following Whitney's analysis; later thought it might be the easy explanation for many cases, especially with verbs of commanding and the like; but have finally decided against it. "Subject of the infinitive" is a Latinism. In "He asked me to go" we do not feel that *me* is a subject; we feel it as an object. If we discard "subject of the infinitive," we do not have to contort so many English ideas to

fit a Latin framework. In "We considered him to be honest" *him* is the real object; *to be* is a kind of objective predicate. In "He urged us to go" *to go* is the object; *us* is indirect. In "He made me eat" *eat* is objective predicate, like "He made me an eater."

Probably ten per cent of these analyses of infinitives are not real analyses—i. e., they don't really explain anything. Say as much to your class occasionally. Our language is full of old worn-down stubs and metamorphosed fragments of idioms which cannot be neatly arranged in a cabinet as Latin specimens can. School work in grammar is not concerned with these except as interesting curios. They are specially numerous in infinitive syntax.

The same kind of statement is true of participles. They are always used like adjectives. To say that a participle has an object or is modified by an adverb clause is nothing to the purpose. *What noun or pronoun does it modify?* Not "How is it acted on?" but "How does it act?"

So much for single words; now for phrases and clauses.

It is best to reserve "phrase" for a preposition and its object.* To call "running at high speed" a phrase is misleading, or at least is such a generality-haze as makes travel difficult. If you call "the sun having risen" a phrase, you won't confuse a grammarian; but you will not light the paths for unacquainted feet.

In the same way it is more effective to reserve

*This sounds like a deviation from the definition given by all grammarians, but is not really much of a departure from their practice. Whitney, for example, discusses nominative absolutes without once using "phrase," and employs the word only in "verb phrase" and "prepositional phrase."

"clause" for dependent clause. "Main clause" is not confusing. Teach them in connection with conjunctions. A coördinating conjunction joins two nouns or two adjectives or two phrases or two clauses, yokes them as a pair, one being as important as the other. A subordinating conjunction joins a clause to some one word. You may never make real progress until you write out that main clause in huge letters and then, in a loop extending from the modified word, write the clause in small letters. In the case of subject clauses used after an expletive *it* ("It is not likely that he will come") the conjunction does no real conjoining, unless you say that it hitches an appositive clause to *it*. The truth of this is doubtful.

One oddity may be worth mention in this connection, just on the chance that it might prevent an embarrassing moment in class. "I am told that he is ill." *That he is ill* is a "retained object," like "He was given a *medal*."

Some are not in favor of diagraming the structure of a sentence. One teacher who has critically observed results in a long experience declares that boys learn the trick of making a passable diagram without acquiring any true understanding of structure. That phenomenon is something I have never seen. Allow me to illustrate from algebra. A boy might learn to "diagram" the cube-root process, and then, by rote, without intelligence, apply his formula and his blocks to any number of different problems in extracting cube-root. He cannot learn any such formula for the solution of miscellaneous problems leading to simultaneous equations. Each one is a separate exercise in diagraming by the use of x, y,

and z the conditions named, under which two or three men run races or give away their money. Have you ever heard that a boy *learned the trick* of arriving at his equations—his diagram, that is—without a corresponding apprehension of what he was doing? Of course there is such a thing as brainless luck occasionally, even in stating problems; but only occasionally.

It is difficult not to believe that when a pupil can sort out clauses and phrases and put them where they belong in a schematic arrangement, he shows a useful mental attainment—specially useful for his writing.

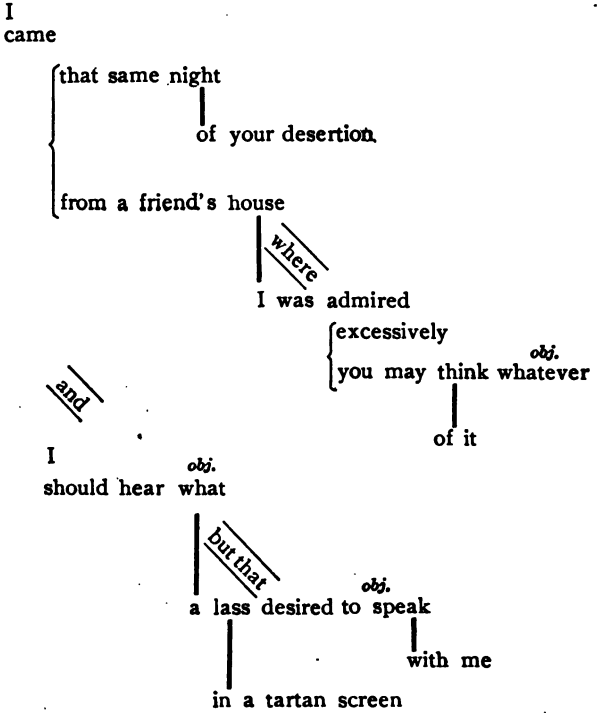
The best diagram is the one that most simply displays the real structure of a sentence. The plan followed in the illustration below is to put the principal verb below its subject, to list all modifiers under the words they modify, and to place appositives, predicate nominatives, and objects at the right of the words that govern them. The sentence is:

"That same night of your desertion I came from a friend's house—where I was excessively admired, whatever you may think of it—and what should I hear but that a lass in a tartan screen desired to speak with me."

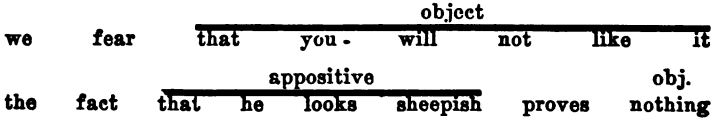
Begin with easy sentences. Don't be in a rush to progress to hard ones.

In all your grammar work emphasize at every opportunity that you aim at practical, useful results, that mere puzzles are not dwelt on. Perhaps while you are dealing with verb phrases some pupil will write "if he had of been." There is your chance. Aim at the essentials. In parsing don't waste time with classes and genders and inflections. If time is

short, it is better to know unfalteringly what an intransitive verb is than to have hazy ideas about inflection of the future perfect, potential mood, participles in *n* as a mark of the old conjugation—and all the myriad of formalisms. Keep perpetually before you that vision of better sentences.



A heavy line will show graphically how noun clauses are used.



CHAPTER VI

JOHN WILSON'S IDEA

The teaching of punctuation can be made to serve a far higher end than mere accuracy in using points; it can be made to cause a betterment in the quality of sentences, an enhancement in maturity and agreeableness of form. The claim sounds extravagant. It seems at first view like a paradox to say that instruction in placing commas will refine the writing of sentences. As a theory no one could accept it. But it is a truth, proved by long experience, arrived at unexpectedly, found as a lucky by-product of a process that used to be thought too mean for noble minds. The fact is that after training in syntax a thorough course in punctuation does more to improve the quality of a mediocre pupil's sentences than any amount of spiritual exhortation.

Just why this should be so is hard to say. One probable reason is that in our headlong, impatient America it is of the greatest benefit to a pupil to have to do something exactly right. We hear the despairing cry from every school and college that our young people are careless, incapable of concentrating accurately, unable to enunciate, unable to phrase definite answers, unable to compose by a predetermined plan. In 1914 the Harvard Board of Overseers voted that "the faculty be requested to devise suitable measures to remedy this condition of affairs"—the condition, namely, of the failure of

students "to write correct and idiomatic English." The Graduate School of Business Administration of Harvard reported in the same year that only 21 per cent of its students (all of them college graduates) received a passing mark when their reports were graded as English, and that these were nearly all C's; but only one year later, as the result of "explicit directions for writing," 60 per cent passed. That is always the requirement if instruction is really to instruct—that it be specific. A dramatic coach who says "Act! Why, you must act the part!" gets no result. A composition teacher who says "Write decently" gets no result. We must specify what is to be done. Nor is it sufficient to lay down a set of rules. They will accomplish nothing at all. It is specific work with unpunctuated sentences that brings improvement in style. I should guess that the brain-process is one of gaining familiarity with a great variety of sentence-forms, of getting a practical, definite acquaintance with the elements of a lot of types which the pupil would not adopt from his reading, but which he does learn to imitate after he has been forced into intimacy with them. Pupils are Egyptians in bondage required to make brick; punctuation furnishes some straw.

I am no psychologist and vouch for no explanation, but I do vouch for the fact of experience. Year after year I have watched results similar to this: Peterkin has no understanding of the difference between one sentence and two sentences; he is given a drill-book which takes him step by step, with plenty of colloquial comment and illustration, through some six hundred unpunctuated sentences culled mostly from periodicals and novels; he flounders dread-

fully, because he "never had any of the darned stuff before"; he goes through it all a second time; thereafter he writes fairly respectable sentences. Granted that this process puts his soul in a treadmill, it must be acknowledged that when he gets through the mill his appearance on paper is much more that of an educated gentleman.

It is instruction in the framing and pointing of sentences that counts. In proportion as you dwell on sentence-structure, enforcing only the simplest and most general requirements for paragraphing, you will have success. This is not the place to argue that statement, but I will cite two witnesses in support of it, the two most effective rhetorics in the market. The 1912 edition of one increased its unpunctuated sentences five times; the preface spoke of "the recent change of emphasis from the paragraph to the sentence." The other, whose 1910 edition had an unusually large proportion of unpunctuated matter, trebled this large proportion in 1914. This signifies something, is not an accident. You must know what is now going on in this changeable world of English, else you may be badly hampered by starting with antiquated ideas that will interfere with your progress. A Yale professor of literature was recently asked what the college would like most stress put upon in the schools. "The sentence" was his unqualified answer.

Of course there are elements of good sentences that punctuation never touches, but it may almost be said that these are beyond the reach of anything but native talent. Variety of forms is directly stimulated, and unity is much emphasized. Suppose, however, for the sake of argument, that the pointing of

other people's sentences gives no training in any quality of force or beauty. The greatest consideration has not been hinted at in that admission. The point to be attended to is this: If you should classify the illiterate blunders in a million words of college-entrance composition, excluding mistakes of spelling and syntax, you would find that the great majority were of just the sort that the study of punctuation tends to eradicate. I read each year more than two million words of school themes, have been for eighteen years classifying errors and studying remedies, have observed what works and what does not, have never had any fondness for theories, have not the slightest affection for commas—and I affirm without any hesitation that punctuation drill is what produces decent sentences. The condition is similar to what we discovered about spelling: that the million errors are not a million at all, but a few hundred common forms incessantly reappearing. So of sentence-structure: it is not a case of a million clumsinesses, but of a few dozen common punctuation blunders that incessantly recur. And just as intensive spelling will remove the great bulk of offensive ignorance, so the greater part of sentence-crudeness will disappear after thorough work in pointing.

How does the ordinary rhetoric address itself to this labor? By trying to persuade you and the pupils that nobody cares much about those arbitrary symbols. If it is a text that makes an honest effort, it is probably sprinkled with untruths. "Two words in apposition should not be separated by a comma" is the first rule in a 200-page manual that I had to use for many years. "Most of the slight pauses requiring a mark will be properly served by the comma"

is from a book containing much good analysis and sound advice. Another widely-used text requires the pupil to state "What kind of pause the author indicates by a comma." The ordinary text is a morgue for the corpses of what were once live truths. A capital book issued in 1912 announces that one use of the semicolon is to introduce. Another, bearing on its cover three mighty names, requires a comma to separate a long subject from its verb. "A colon," declares another *Composition,* "is used to separate the different members of a compound sentence, when they themselves are divided by semicolons"—an affirmation that contains only as much truth as "Horse-cars are used to convey the population of New York City." Such dead things do no damage; they are harmless. But it is harmful to teacher and pupil to present them as of equal importance with a rule for a comma before the conjunction *but.* For their effect is then to make a school suppose that all punctuation is as lifeless as themselves.

In another way the ordinary "section" does damage—by so misstating the simplest truths that pupils and teacher are led to regard the whole subject as nebulous and mystical. For example, "To the mind of the writer, this explanation has much to commend it" is said to deserve a comma because the phrase is out of its natural order; yet such a rule would call for a comma in "Over the door we hung a horseshoe," where no rational punctuator now advises a point. "Commas are used in a complex sentence to separate the dependent clause from the rest of the sentence." Yes; also commas are not used for such a purpose; also if a man is lost in a city he will find his way if he goes straight ahead—or turns. Here

is the most elusive subject in the whole code (the distinction between a restrictive and a non-restrictive clause) cheerfully committed to one vacuous rule and illustrated by two sentences containing restrictive clauses! Then the author adds, with an artlessness that all power of sarcasm is feeble against, "If the connection is close, the comma is usually omitted." Of the same astounding quality is the rule, "Commas are used to separate the members of a compound sentence when they are short or closely connected," one illustration having the adversative *yet* and the other having five very brief and similar imperatives without any conjunctions. Why should we be told when space is precious that "the dash is sometimes used with the colon"? It is equally true by modern canons that it is poor taste to use it so. Suppose that a pupil, having been taught that "adjective phrases are set off by commas," writes "I bought a couple, of newspapers"; shall we chide him for knowing too much about grammar? It is impossible to speak temperately of such futility masquerading as instruction.

We have passed from untruths through chaos. The third division of this indictment of the ordinary "section" is its extreme brevity and resultlessness. Even if it presented only the truth, presented all the truth, what effect does such a summary conspectus ever have? Does it really perform work in the minds of flesh-and-blood children? Does it achieve the difficult task of planting habits, or accomplish the miracle of extirpating wrong habits? If so, the average teacher should be enlightened as to how he may avoid his seventy-times-seven explaining of the old familiar rule, his careful preparation for in-

troducing a new one. If many intelligent pupils have to be hounded for years before they will habitually place a comma before an adversative conjunction, what infinitesimal tittle of influence is imparted by the following: "When a series of distinct statements all have a common dependence on what precedes or follows them, they may be separated from each other by semicolons"? A formal law, stating in three lines the whole mystery of non-restrictive clauses, offering no comment, supporting itself by the meagerest illustrations, seems directed at some eidolon of a student, some pedagogic abstraction; for mere human minds, albeit with a literary bent, are likely to falter after months of drill. Real results in actual young brains are obtained only by protracted and earnest drill—the kind of effort used by the supervisor of English who wrote in the *English Journal* for September, 1914, about "sentence sense." Experience had taught her that true instruction is warfare, that the "section" is merely a colored poster advertising for volunteers. She said: "I wonder if other schools have to fight [what does the 'section' know about fighting?] as vigorously [how much vigor is there in the 'section'?] as we do to eradicate [what grubbing for noxious roots does the 'section' do?] such mistake as this: 'My little sister is very pretty she has light hair and blue eyes.'" Our "section" either has nothing to say about such an unscholarly negative or disposes of it with matadorish grace thus: "The comma should not be used instead of a semicolon in sentences thus combined." What need for a "section" to declare bloody war and "wage it unremittingly for several years"? No need whatever. The "section" has merely to wave its wand

and say, "Be thou eradicated." It deals only with magic, using cryptic utterances like "Sentences should not be written for the purpose of illustrating punctuation" or "You can see from this conversation of Tom and Maggie, how punctuation marks may suggest to the reader a number of things." (That comma after *Maggie* suggests one thing to at least one reader.) In the name of all that is easy and idyllic why should teachers countermine in the trenches and charge with bayonets if the pleasing incantations of "sections" really effect any results?

Whence came all these untruths and easy incantations? From previous textbooks. Where did those authors get their knowledge and their mistakes? From still earlier books. If we follow up this cascade, what source do we reach? First we shall come upon Bigelow's manual, a storage reservoir that irrigated all the punctuational fields of the country in the 80's and 90's. Bigelow was editorial proofreader for the Riverside Press, a sort of Archbishop of Commas for his generation, whose influence went everywhere and went deep. Thousands of professors and editors hold today opinions that were first fed by the waters of his dicta. But he was not a source. He gave out no more than he received. The stream runs back to John Wilson's *Treatise* of 1871. Not that Wilson originated our usage. No man was powerful enough to do that. He often protests against the custom of his day, but he records it and has to yield to it. His *Treatise* was not a source of usage, but the one great source of ready-to-hand and easy-to-copy exposition of usage.

Wilson was an analytical Scotchman, who died in 1868. As a printer he had ideals; as a theologian he

was a keen progressive; he loved and helped to edit Burns; he received an honorary degree from Harvard; and all the days of his long life he studied punctuation. He reverenced his subject because of the assistance it could afford in developing a clear, sound style. Unlike the makers of our modern "sections," he could honestly testify that in the preparation of his nineteen editions in forty years "little aid could be derived from other writers." His second American edition in 1855 he thought "the most complete of any on the subject that he has seen." Not content with having made the best, he continually amplified, revising and extending his comments, enforcing his precepts with many pages of illustrative sentences, and offering instruction by a great many more pages of unpunctuated sentences. The twentieth edition of the *Treatise*, brought out three years after his death, is the great storehouse which every succeeding text-maker has pillaged without acknowledgment—often, no doubt, plundering at second or third hand, and so not even being aware whence his booty had originally come. The little manual that puts "not" in its rule for appositives is sheer burglary from Wilson's treasures. That absurd perversion is taken verbatim, but the editor had not the wit to retain a qualifying clause ("if they may be regarded as a single phrase") which shows that Wilson conceived his rule as a statement of the exceptional case. Wilson is also responsible (heaven only knows why he phrased his rule as he did) for that commandment to "set off adjective phrases by commas." It was Wilson who dragged others to hideous ruin down by declaring that "two clauses, one depending on the other, are

separated by a comma." He could hardly have said anything else if he paid deference to the facts of his period. But in his comments he urges the avoidance of a comma with a restrictive clause. His supplementary exposition is always clear and thorough. He maintains (what custom later overruled, but has now returned to) that the second comma should be used in *John, James, and Harry.* He perceived that a comma ought not to be placed between a subject and its verb; and he is sustained by the best modern usage. He announces (though he cannot disregard the universal opinion of his day) that punctuation has for its primary function the separating of grammatical elements. Verbose and tiresome he may be, but his system is complete and unimpeachable. He justified his pronouncement that "the essential principles of punctuation are as fixed and determinate as the canons of syntax."

He has not convinced the world of the truth of this. Practically every rhetorician in this country has taken his arrangement of rules directly or indirectly from Wilson, yet denies Wilson's fundamental notion. It is curious to see how a whole generation was willing to pillage the storehouse for facts, but scrupulously refrained from even looking at the central fact. The little things were easy to carry away; the main thing was too heavy to bother with.

Those who "borrowed" or "used freely" were singularly forbearing in another way: they never touched what Wilson would have called the most valuable idea in his repository—namely, the italicized sentence at the end of this paragraph. Probably the borrowers could not understand it. Possibly

it seemed wrong-end-to, and so they judged it was a misprint, a damaged piece of goods—and left it behind. Perhaps they were repelled by the four unnecessary commas. More likely they were charitable, feeling in their gratitude that they ought not to let the world know how rabid poor old Wilson grew in his later years. Since I have no reason for such compunctions, I will reveal what he said: "Punctuation has not received that attention which its importance demands. Let punctuation form a branch of academical instruction; let it be studied after a competent knowledge of English etymology and syntax has been acquired; let the rules be thoroughly comprehended by the pupil. *It is worthy of remark, that, by habituating themselves to the practice of pointing, their attention will naturally be directed to clearness of thought, and accuracy of expression.*"

This is not the ill-considered ranting of a hobbyist nor the excitement of enthusiasm. It is the deliberate, well-founded judgment of a canny Scot, of a rational, careful, highly respected, conservative citizen, whose intellect was stable and vigorous, whose whole big *Treatise* does not exhibit one piece of false analysis. Heed his advice so far as circumstances at Smithboro permit. If you are not allowed to select a rhetoric that has many exercises, perhaps you can arrange to have printed and sold to pupils at cost some strips of unpunctuated sentences. This is done with good results at some preparatory schools. Another device, easier but not so effective, is to dictate every day a good illustrative sentence from newspapers or novels or your own brain. If punctuation is not in favor at Smithboro, don't begin a campaign

for it. Keep quiet, do what you can, and bide your time. Perhaps after a year or two you can have your way, and you may even be instrumental in persuading grade teachers to establish a few rudiments. A simple "Comma Book" has been used with telling effect on eighth-grade pupils. That is where the fight ought to begin. Those grade-years of writing without reference to points are what make high-school labor so herculean.

In teaching punctuation you will never get anywhere with abstractions. "Parenthetical" and "restrictive" and "disjunctive" convey nothing to the average pupil—nor to the rest of us, for that matter. What do you really learn about "category" from this definition? "It is not an instrument which the mind uses, but is an element in a whole which in its unity the mind is." You can get nothing out of that unless you previously knew what it means. But you can learn something from this: "A category is a way the mind sees things; it sees one thing happen after another thing; it knows that a series of things has kept happening one after another for a long time; it has to believe that the same series of happenings is going to continue tomorrow, and the day after, and so on; and it can't think of life except as such a series; and this fact-that-we-can't-get-away-from, this fact of happening-one-after-another, we call Time. That is one category. There is another one of Space." It is long-winded and very unphilosophical; but it does work in a plain human brain. Try always to be concrete, to talk of things, of known facts, when you have to explain "parenthetical."

Try punctuation. Give it a full trial. The

only objectors to it, so far as I know, are those who have never really tested it. The sentence-campaign is a real fight, a long one. Any teacher who has developed the punctuation strategy, who has fought vigorously and waged war for years, knows that nothing else he can do produces a tithe of such fundamental benefit. Plentiful exercises with plain human prose, not with the mystifications of oratory and poesy, is a mighty engine against the grisly legions of carelessness. You may mobilize your forces of "orderly thinking" and inspire them with devoted valor, but they are crude militia until Drill-master Punctuation has trained them in tactics. His task is long. He is harsh and unromantic. He must begin with grammar and dwell upon it pitilessly. Most recruits and taxpayers consider him brutal and inglorious. But he knows what war really is. He wins victories.

CHAPTER VII

WHAT IS A COMMA?

Punctuation is considered the least interesting subject in the world, is never a topic at teachers' conventions, will cause every friend to look bored and uneasy if suggested in conversation. This indifference is due to three causes: (1) the feeling that punctuation is unesthetic, (2) ignorance of the fact that it is of prime importance, (3) ignorance of what it is. Chapter I should have disposed of the first cause and Chapter VI of the second. The purpose of this chapter is to dispose of the third. The title is chosen because an adequate exposition of what a comma is reveals the whole sum of the knowledge we are seeking, is in fact about four-fifths of the total.

A clear understanding is marvelously hard to get. Many persons cherish the most violent prejudices, so that one principal of schools will wish to discharge a teacher who uses no commas at the ends of lines in addressing an envelope, and a secretary of a state board of education will not allow any commas at all in his printed reports; one man is nauseated by a comma with a dash, and another is grieved at the boorishness of omitting it. Such extreme feelings are exceptional. The more common attitude is that nobody really knows and that every person has to guess when it is time to stick in a mark. The following professions of agnosticism were all

made by men of exceptionally good intellect, all somewhat prominent as editors or educators: "Everyone has to pick up a system for himself"; "I go absolutely by the way it feels"; "I can't argue the questions, but simply know that in my long proofreading career I have always done thus and so, and am sure I am right"; "no comprehensive code can possibly account for all the subtleties and emphases of the uses of commas"; "no definite rules can be given"; "punctuation comes by nature"; "I strive instinctively to be clear." Is there in the whole range of human puzzles anything more baffling than this unanimous assertion that nobody can know what a comma is? I should not have the hardihood to write this chapter if it were not for three very good reasons: First, that all these agnostics really do use commas in about the same ways; second, that I am offering here nothing of my own, but am merely referring you to a source of indubitable authority; third, you will be saved any amount of perplexity and blundering if you know of a surety exactly what a comma is. When you have finished the chapter, look up the *Century's* definition; you can then be satisfied that you have acquired no exceptional or unreliable notions.

One caution may be necessary: don't try to proselyte other teachers, don't argue with older heads, don't strive to revolutionize methods or change textbooks, or show them what's what in Smithboro. Teach in the way you are asked to teach. If the principal or the head of the department thinks that "rigid rules" are destructive of the spirit, don't oppose him. You might as well hope to persuade an old man that his religion is vain. What follows is

to inform you. Any teacher whose information is thorough will in due time, if he is tactful and hard-working, find that his ideas are effective without any propaganda. Be skeptical about what follows. You have only one writer's word for it, and you cannot be sure of its truth until you have tested and checked up for a year. If only this chapter prevents your present conceptions from solidifying without challenge and analysis, it will do much.

What is a comma? The most recent and most ambitious answer has been given in *Educational Review* for October, 1915. The writer presents a really able analysis, founded on observation, displaying with acumen the essence of what authors attempt with points. She makes short work of the comma-shows-a-pause idea. Next she sweeps away the criterion of syntax, because this is a dictum, not answerable to reason. "By virtue of what inherent quality," she asks, "does the vocative demand the comma? If the amateur ranges in literature he will learn that this construction often actually does express itself without a point." She says that rhetorics are scholastic because they offer us a "synthesis of practice," as shown by their customary expression, "the comma is used." This will not do for her; she must seek out a "working principle; not a code, but a real psychology, based on intrinsic character." Ponder that concept—the "intrinsic character" of a comma. That means that a dot prolonged curvingly downward to a point has an inherent psychological quality, a power implicit in that particular shape, belonging to it in its very existence. This is no distortion of her plain meaning, for she amplifies the thought on many pages with such expres-

sions as these: "Each sign must perform its function by virtue of some immediate suggestive power, or not at all", "marks peculiarly suggestive in form", "the indeterminate curves of the interrogation", "the quick expressiveness of the other signs", "the comma, with its tiny hook leftward, creates a suspension", "the colon is essentially dramatic in effect, abrupt, definitive, revealing no suggestion of subordination."

A mere man knows not how to treat that. As a fancy it is admirable. Moreover the writer applies her imaginings to the facts with rare discrimination, interpreting the designs of authors with sympathetic skill. Hers is a competent mind and a seeing eye. That is why her notion is worth exhibiting. If she fables, what may not be expected from less gifted reasoners? If she is right, the whole world is wrong; for the universal assumption has been that our points are arbitrary symbols, that their use is an artificial code, valid only because it is generally understood by a large body of readers. But this code she will not accept, because it "lies apart from natural creative expression." Hence no one can really know what a comma is unless he has that literary sensibility which reveals the connotation inseparable from a dot with a long tail.

We cannot believe that any symbol conveys a message except to persons who are accustomed to it. A dash, a dot, and a dash suggest to our author suspension, decision, suspension; to some early printers they would have meant nothing, comma, nothing; to a telegraph operator they are the letter K. Commas "cannot set off a word" to her eye, but they actually do that for my eye. To her a dot

symbolizes completeness; to one who is familiar with repeating decimals it represents interminability. To her a semicolon is "a period made suspensive"; to a Greek scholar it is a question mark. To her mind the colon is dramatic; by "most" of Dr. Johnson's day it was confounded with a semicolon.

Such a child of fancy must be thrilled by the life history of that poor colon. There he was "inherently dramatic and definitive," of power to "charge with final force"—and yet for 700 years before Gutenberg was born he had served as the smallest divider; in the Mainz Psalter of 1459 he was the slight mark between the ponderous commas that terminated sentences; and for a century after the founder of the Aldine Press was dead he could still be found in this menial office. Even Johnson's perspicacity could recognize his nature only with a "perhaps," and had to acknowledge that he was "not very necessary, being used to mark a pause greater than that of a comma and less than that of a period." To this day he does lowly duty in schedules and prayer-books and arithmetics. Not until 1915 was he known to have any intrinsic quality, and then his nature was visible to only one bright woman.

To all the world besides he is inherently a meaningless pair of dots. Only recently has he been invested with an artificial significance, so that now we see him wearing the livery of a footman who is to usher us from the hall of a sentence into the drawing room; appropriate only in constructions that are formal and dignified. This function has been assigned so recently that the *Century* defines a colon as marking "a discontinuity greater than that indicated by the semicolon." Most readers of this

article have lived long enough to watch the process of agreeing upon one particular office.

The whimsy of "inherent quality" will hardly be dangerous in this form, for few will take it seriously. But in another guise it misleads intellectual men, who will tell you that they use the comma at a given point in an undefinable way, *feeling* that it is needed, feeling that it *charges with emphasis* the expression that follows. They *feel* that their emotion will be transmitted; are offended by the soulless suggestion that no comma conveys anything until the world has agreed on a meaning. This curious failure to realize that the force of points cannot be created by the individual is shown in the ease with which we have credited the establishing of our punctuation to one man, the founder of the Aldine Press. If ever a man was fitted for that superhuman task, he was. In scholarship he was prodigious, in zeal he was lofty, in energy stupendous; he founded an academy; he made of his assistants an even more powerful institution; his press was an educational fountain. From my youth up I have never doubted that he "primarily developed" or was "a pioneer" or that he "introduced." If the *Century* says so, who dares doubt? Yet such a feat he never attempted. Manutius no more introduced our punctuation than Chaucer invented poetry. He was not nearly so original as Chaucer. Indeed originality was farthest from his aim. As he wanted his readers to understand easily, it was necessary to use points in conventional ways that had been familiar for— I don't know how long. No one has thought it worth while to write the tangled history. We may see modern-looking commas in Greek script of the

sixth century and top-and-bottom periods in fifth-century Greek. Doubtless the mystic strands of precedent stretch back unbroken through Alexandria to the founding of Thebes. The encyclopedia takes us as far as the third century B.C., when Aristophanes, a critical editor of Byzantium, "invented" a system. We might suppose from the introductions to treatises that during all those centuries no director of a scriptorium ever committed his code to writing, and that the art of punctuation was again "invented" by Manutius, and that his grandson was the first to record a printer's system in his *Orthographiae Ratio* in 1561. We should have to guess that the art swam into view like a comet at the Bosporus, disappeared, and was never seen again till it shone over Venice seventeen centuries later. I have no time or knowledge to examine this astounding assumption. It is sufficient for our purpose to note that if we open a volume of medieval facsimiles, we may see a French MS. of the seventh century in which semicolons separate the sentences; most of the MSS. of later date show sentences beginning with capitals, ending with periods, and pointed freely with colons. The early printers adopted precisely what the scribes had made familiar. Before Manutius ever saw a printing-press, perhaps before he had seen a printed book, three Germans produced at Paris a volume whose punctuation looks remarkably modern, with its parentheses, its hyphens, and its commas— to mention only the refinements. In contrast to this a page of an Aldine preface of 1513 is a maze, so thickly is it strewn with commas, so bewildering is the use of the period as both an end stop and an internal point, so curious is the total

absence of the colon and the employment of a semicolon as an abbreviation for *ue*. Manutius's page is farther from the customs of our day than the page of Gering, Kranz, and Freiburger of 1471. Later printers were quite unconscious of what had been "established" at Venice. I have a beautiful piece of Dutch typography printed 127 years after Manutius was dead, in which the old-fashioned colons and slanting lines declare that their masters are independent of the Aldine Press. They followed a system that was more common in their part of the world. Every normal printer had to pass judgment on how to make his books most easy to read. The marks were few in number, but had been so long employed with such diversity and contrariety by the scribes that printers had to select from a bewildering mass of precedent. Practice was a Chaos where Opinion sat umpire and Prejudice was referee and Best Usage was an unknown god, ignorantly worshiped perhaps, but worshiped. Printers never so lost their reason as to conceive that they could originate anything. Their one hope was to guess at the practice that was most generally acceptable. After 250 years they succeeded in the extraordinary task of agreeing on one fairly uniform code, in which a comma marked the smallest degree of separation.

A common theory until after 1800 (it was never a fact) was that a comma indicated a pause for oral reading. The new *Britannica* says as much, and a most reverend American trio would instruct our youth in "indicating to the eye the pauses and the modulations of the voice." This definition is usually denied nowadays, but persists as vigorously as the fear of unlucky Fridays. Very recently I was told

by a man who directs the typographical policy of a university journal that "a dash is used to prolong the pause indicated by a comma." Nothing will ever jar his calm certainty that this is truth. And it is true that an oral reader will usually (by no means always) halt for a comma and that the average pause at a semicolon may be less than at a period. But only a human metronome could possibly time himself by the points. Any novel opened at any page would prove in any psychological laboratory to any rational observer that a spirited reader can render the author's meaning properly only by pausing longer at some commas than at some periods, and by not pausing at all at other commas. The old notion is beneath argument. Take up any book printed when that notion was most common—say early in the last century—and observe how many points are methodically placed where no reader ever thinks of pausing. Remembering that most literature is pointed by printers, inquire how many printers have ever measured time-spaces. Not only is all observation of fact against this delusion; "authority" is overwhelmingly against it. As early as 1842 Francillon, a Londoner who reverenced authority, was not afraid to say that "such rules [of pausing] are of little or no value." Wilson, the father of American rule-books, announced its falsity; and time would fail me to quote the verdicts of Marsh and Bigelow and De-Vinne and the Fowlers and Orcutt and Teall and Klein and Manly.

The pause myth would not be worth attention if it were not for an insidious faith which is corollary to it— namely, that we may tell where to insert commas in our writing by noticing whether there

would be a pause in oral reading. Four times out of five the test applies; the fifth betrays sprawling ignorance. The test is a will-o-the-wisp that leads to such boggy forms as "Springfield Illinois, is his town," or "Hurry up Henry, you'll be late," or "That, was not to be thought of." It is exactly comparable to the belief that you may tell where to dig a well by noticing where a forked twig bends down. Since the water-witch seldom fails in a favorable locality, many trust it so implicitly that no geologist can persuade them of their folly. Neither can any lazy writer who believes in pause-witchery be convinced by a presentation of the dull facts of syntactical stratification. Any open mind, if it is willing to observe a little and reason the least bit, can perceive what the truth is.

We are getting on. A comma is a little signal showing disjunction that is not oral. Of what kind, then? Many have answered: "The purpose is to indicate to the eye the construction of the sentence." I have quoted approvingly a pronouncement that "the primary function is displaying grammatical structure." This may be true or false. If "construction" means kind of syntactical element, the definition is absurdly untrue. No author or printer ever undertook to show that "this group is a prepositional phrase" or "here is an adverb clause." Yet dozens of controversial paragraphs have been written to assert or deny that points exhibit structure. To assert what never was true of any printed page is folly; to deny the existence of what never existed is folly. And since these writers are sensible beings, they must be misunderstanding one another. There is only one possible way of stating the case truly:

Commas separate syntactical elements and their uses can be taught only to those who have a knowledge of syntax; they do not separate for the purpose of displaying grammatical relations. This is so obvious that I know not why men argue the question. Any long complex sentence so close-knit as to need no punctuation will settle it.

Why, then, does a comma disjoin things? Because they are not closely connected in thought.

Doubtless that formula is inadequate or illogical, so that it can be picked to pieces. But this is not a dialectic excursion; we wish to get somewhere. I mean that subjects and complements are closely related in thought to their verbs, and that restrictive modifiers are conceived as cohering to what they modify. If sentences had no other elements, it is unlikely that commas would ever have been invented. They are used to forewarn a reader of expressions that are interjected, absolute, parenthetical, loosely added, or set down as unconnected items in a series— in short (it might almost be said) such words or groups as have no structure. In this sense the statement that "punctuation indicates construction" is strictly true, though some quibblers might prefer to say "indicates lack of construction." Whatever the term we employ, however judgment has fluctuated from age to age, the central fact has always been, apparent in every systematic effort, that printers have tried to warn readers of words that were juxtaposed but not interwoven. The desire for clearness has been so strong that until fifty years ago object clauses were regularly pointed, and to this day many rhetorics advise the separating of a subject clause from its immediately following verb.

Careful writers of only a generation ago sometimes used twice as many commas as would be tolerated by a fastidious editor of today. Yet the principle has never altered. It has forever been a question of "Is this element to be considered as loosely conjoined?"

When an author inserts a comma, takes it out, debates, puts it back again, he is engaged with some nice distinction. It appears to be a matter of commas. Hence he denies that punctuation is an exact system, and pities any mind that entertains such an absurdity. The fact is that he is not deciding about a comma; he is determining his meaning, balancing two desirabilities: (1) linking his thought closely, (2) disjoining his thought somewhat. It is a question of artistic effect, often a very delicate one. But when he has made choice of which meaning to express, the debate about a comma has disappeared. The mark goes or stays by mechanical necessity. These entirely different processes, one artistic and one mechanical, have been confounded by rhetoricians, and hence the vehemence of their feeling that "all these subtleties and emphases cannot be codified." To be sure, the subtleties of meaning cannot be classified. No fiat can render *perhaps* always parenthetical or compel us to put a comma before the *and* that joins the members of a compound sentence. The law always reads in terms of *if* it is parenthetical, *if* you desire to show that the two members are not strictly coördinate, *if* a reader might for the moment suppose that the *and* was joining two words. The law seldom says, "Thou shalt use such a point with such a word"; but rather, "When thou hast defined thy meaning to thyself,

there is only one way to convey it." A verbal artist will protest that he feels a dozen different shades of meaning; he would like a graded series of commas. But there are no such things. All we have is the one crude symbol to indicate disjunction. Once the subtlety of his thought is analyzed, there is no subtlety about putting in a comma to set off what is loosely connected.

"By virtue of what inherent quality?" I know not. A vocative or a nominative absolute appears to me disruptive by nature. That may be a mere matter of association, like taking it for granted that bare feet are inherently informal. I find it impossible to get interested in such metaphysics. No one can tell about the inherent quality of an artificial matter. We are dealing only with certain facts of civilization. The scribes did as a matter of fact inherit preconceptions that were older than Aristotle, teachings about absolute elements and minor portions of a period, which had long been shown by devices called *puncta*. The world has never departed far from their scheme. Nor have we any interest here in ideas about reforming usage, or in noticing how original minds amend or discard usages. We are looking at common custom. There is no denying that able writers have used commas to show pauses or emphases, and that groaning publishers have followed their copy. Very respectable brains have supposed that commas can be manipulated by individual taste and have pleaded for the signals that mean so much to those who hoist them. But what about us who read? Possibly we are like wireless operators who can receive a mixture of Morse and Continental; perhaps we can guess at a conglomer-

ate of three or four codes. But unless it is to some extent a prearrangement the most soulfully placed point conveys nothing to us. For example, a critical, level-headed editor recently spoke of "using a comma to emphasize what follows"; yet the rhetorics all speak of separation. And that "inherent quality" article directly contradicts the editor, declaring that "the mark from its form simply fails to affect the expression by which it is followed"; it states the complementary conviction that "the emphasis of the comma is wholly given to the matter by which the point is preceded." The clash of fancies is more mirth-provoking than usually comes to an essayist's hand, and a witty writer could entertain his readers with it. Our purpose, however, is not to get fun, but information. If two such highly intelligent witnesses negative each other, they create an unescapable conviction that a comma no more shows direction than a white light can mean starboard to one skipper and port to another; that a comma will not obediently mean what we imagine it means; that we must humbly learn what it does actually signify in rhetorical navigation. Or is a sympathetic reader supposed to exercise some clairvoyant power that we ordinary fellows lack? It would be useful in reading illiterate themes, which are always pointed inspirationally. Young writers adore those rhetorical uses. They "kind of think" that some stop is demanded at this place, and in goes a comma. Sign-painters often "feel" that this is a good spot for emphasis, and in goes a comma. The results are offensive to all who do not themselves employ commas in those ways, but the pupil and the painter are invariably unreceptive of our

criticism, proud that they are not hampered by rules. These are extreme cases, but not caricature. They remind us of the unpleasant likelihood that a comma is absurd unless used in just the ways prescribed by a considerable portion of humanity.

My whole skepticism about rhetorical use is like the feeling Alice had in the Looking-Glass world when Humpty Dumpty declared that "slithy" was a portmanteau word, packed with a double meaning —lithe and slimy. Alice, we are told, thoughtfully asked another question. I am thoughtful and strive to be polite when a man tells me what a comma means *to him.* I shall now make a second inquiry, more difficult and more important than what a comma is: Where is the code for using it?

If a man from Mars, noticing that our clothes are similar in essentials but different in details, should wish to conform to the best mode, he would be perplexed. Even if he disregarded the extremes of the actor's loudness and the collegian's slackness and the clergyman's severity, he would still see unreconcilable differences in the garb of men of his own age and status. Now they wear high vests at dinner and again they show a broad expense of stiff or of pleated bosom. In the same group of careful dressers some leave the bottom of the vest unbuttoned, some wear belts. Why do they differ? He makes bold to ask a man whose vest is entirely buttoned, "How do you decide this question of fashion?" The reply is, "Oh, there's no rule; it's a matter of individual taste." He asks a man with a pin in his tie, "Why do some men not wear pins?" And the reply is, "Oh, there's no rule about it." But the Martian is a keen fellow. He can demonstrate in a minute that there are rules,

very binding ones. No one leaves the top of his vest unbuttoned; no one wears a flower in his tie. Although these matters are slight, the rules against them are as well known as the law against embezzlement—and better observed. Yet every man he questions would scoff at the idea that there is any "authority" for doing or not doing. Every one asserts that he dresses as he likes. Not one has ever looked into a code of fashions; every one feels superior to a tailor's pictures or to a column in *Vogue*. All the Martian can do is to notice custom and follow as best he may.

This is the situation when a pupil is required to write correct sentences. He is a Martian, plunged into an intricacy of conventions. And every textbook declares, "Oh, there are no hard-and-fast rules." Yet if he has the least discernment he perceives all kinds of inviolable regulations. He is puzzled. We offer him meager instruction.

The allegory is by no means a parallel. Clothing is a joking matter; punctuation is serious for a pupil. Fashions are forced upon us from infancy; punctuation is not, except in the case of those who are by temperament so observant that they acquire unconsciously the prevailing customs of spelling and pointing. This difference has never received proper attention from pedagogues. Many an editor and professor who never consciously acquired a single rule can use commas with unimpeachable skill. He has absorbed an accurate knowledge of the art without formal instruction, and therefore protests against teaching strict rules. But the majority of pupils, whose senses are alert for matters of costume, never distinguish between a comma and a

period. They are from Mars and they must be shown. A more vital difference between the parable and the fact is that fashions in clothes vary from spring to autumn, while custom in punctuation is a matter of generations.

Youth hardly sees the garb of a generation ago; the commas of a past age are often before him. His teacher may be more familiar with Irving's stops than with Kipling's, and hence is likely to suppose that there aren't any rules. The most misleading part of the parable is the correct dresser. We have small respect for a human clothes-horse; we don't wish to copy him. We do, however, respect the best modern usage as to stops. It may be so elusive that we doubt its existence, so mechanical that we get no joy out of it; but if we could lay hands on a certified copy of Best Usage, knowing that it really deserved its title, really was a consensus of the best taste of our age, we should welcome it with gratitude, cleave to it, use it.

Is such a code in existence? Can we find any body of uniform practice? Here is a list of the possible sources of authority:

1. Pure Reason. I cannot understand this, and so cannot discuss it fairly. It would be fun to work out a consistent *interpungendi ratio* if one had power to foist it upon the world, but the work would be dreamy romance. The only practical course is to inquire: "What do commas mean to the men who use them most?"

2. Instinct. If this sounds like sarcasm, listen to the words of a teacher who inveighs against rules. "There has been too much *worship* and too little *spirit* in this matter of punctuation. Can we not

induce children to think so clearly that, when the sentence does demand a semicolon, it is to be used, not as a thing possessing grace in itself, but because without it some comma may not possess sufficient suggestive force?" This most attractive religion represents the hope of many righteous persons. I would give half my wealth if I could embrace the creed, but since I have never seen it convey truth to illiterate minds, I must reject it.

3. Authors. How can we get at them? Evidence of all kinds indicates that the majority (perhaps four-fifths) leave punctuation to the printer. Few of the minority would allow themselves to be called "authorities." When we cite authors we make the assumption that they are as competent in pointing as in diction. Any sensible disputant about the meaning of words would agree in advance to quit his opposition to an idiom if six authors of established fame could be quoted against him. Words are an author's medium; his taste about them is significant. But as to that arbitrary comma-code, perhaps he knows it and probably he does not.

4. Rhetorics. Most of these show considerable faith in instinct and reason, most of them speak of what authors do, every one prints laws that were drafted by printers, nearly all rehearse rules that died out of use decades ago. How can we look to them?

5. Publishers. It cannot be denied that influential printers are the real developers of punctuation. The producers of books always have been. The younger Aldus's *Ratio* was simplified for school use by Dutch printers. In America it was a Boston printer, Wilson, who developed a code so sound and

comprehensive that for half a century his influence permeated all rhetorics. Today the greatest influence behind our manuals is the judgment of a New York printer, DeVinne. Publishers have always been under the necessity of adopting some fixed method of making their books easily intelligible. They are sadly familiar with idiosyncrasies of copy, and appreciate as no author can how those oddities detract from effectiveness. Their office is to help a writer to express his personality by using their marks in only those ways that the world understands. The author may make a portmanteau of a comma; the publisher's business is to unpack. Rigid and wrong he may be at times, but in the main he is right. We could depend on any usage sanctioned by a majority of thoughtful publishers. The difficulty of compiling their judgments is that we never know how much of a compromise between printer and author is represented by any given book. The only way to discover how publishers agree would be to visit their offices, propose a questionnaire, tabulate results. This would be an extensive labor, perhaps impossible; for some offices might be unable to extend so expensive a courtesy to the curious visitor.

Is there any sixth kind of guidance? These five all reduce to one—publishers. If you could know the practice of twenty good houses in any matter, and should find them all agreeing, you would feel assured that you knew the best usage. If eighteen agreed, you could disregard the other two. Fifteen would make you confident enough. Who would stand out against a ruling that had eleven votes in its favor? Not that any decision would be binding upon a man

who nurses prepossessions, but that it would inform us teachable persons of what commas really do mean to the great world that we hope will understand our composition.

Just such a compilation of the practice of publishers is issued every month, sent everywhere, is in every living-room in the country. We may not admire the literary quality of the medium in which it is to be found, but that has nothing to do with the case. The dozens of publishers are zealous to display current literature in the most attractive and easily understood way; they employ men whose life study has been to know what points mean to the world, to know what modern conventions really are, to follow and conform to good usage. They are conservative enough to satisfy any professor. They may not be strong reasoners, but that very fact makes their counsel safe; for a reasoner about any matter of custom is the worst ignoramus. It may also be said to their credit, as Prince Hal modestly said of himself in comparison with Falstaff, "I lack some of thy instinct." They are the men who know. You may deny them all literary taste, all wit, all versatility, and may shrug your shoulders at the small-mindedness of any one; nevertheless they are keen students of how to manipulate a few arbitrary symbols so that a writer's feeling may be conveyed with the least distortion. They build an arbitrary code; there is no other possibility under heaven. Any one of us could devise an infinitely more flexible and inclusive set of signals, but it would be a toy, useless for communicating with our fellows. We could extend and improve the present code if only the world would make us dictator and obediently

learn our novelties. Americans, however, are so stubborn against useful innovation that they will hardly adopt the metric system. I still have to sell my potatoes by the clumsy bushel; and I must consent to have my mental wares measured by the vulgar standard if I wish them transferred to other people's brains.

Complete rules are given, to the last detail they are given, in our scrupulous periodicals. Authors' contributions are not evidence, for without a vast deal of consulting we could not separate the ignorance of amateurs from an established policy. The parts of each issue—notably the editorials—that are known to be conformed to a system will furnish the facts of usage as one office interprets them. Start with the *Nation.* Though it will not furnish emotional dialogue, a single number will show examples of three-fourths of all the customs we may have doubts about. To be specific, let us hunt for a comma with a dash. We shall not find it. The combination is not to be found in the *Outlook.* The Christmas *Harper's* shows not one case in the prose of eighteen writers; evidently the editors are severe against the use. We cannot find it in the *Saturday Evening Post,* nor in *Scribner's* unless copy has been followed, nor in *Life,* nor in *Collier's,* nor in any (?) newspaper. I have observed it in only three monthlies and in a few college journals that prefer a staid conservatism.

Will you decide that such a minority is right and that the great majority is lacking in sensitiveness for the finer nuances? Even if you cannot give up the cherished practice for yourself, will you dare advise others to follow it? Will you disdain such

authority? Hear the words of one of America's greatest scholars, Professor Marsh, who wrote in a puristic period, who was so refined as to lament the "corrupt" pronunciation of *Cholmondeley,* who said of the crude journalism of the 50's: "There is no agency through which man acts more powerfully upon the mind of his fellow-man, and the influence of the art of printing upon language and thought has reached its acme in the daily newspaper." If he were restored to life today, would he not feel respectful toward our best weeklies? One of the most conservative American editors of influential magazines has declared that changes of punctuation in periodicals begin with the newspapers, and another that dailies like the New York *Post* and *Times* are safer than the monthlies.

The present-day aggregate of clear-eyed, responsive, conscientious typography has attained almost complete solidarity. Notice a few examples of how it differs from the rhetorics: it practically never furnishes an instance of a semicolon before such words as *namely*; it never omits the comma before a vocative; only grudgingly and with a big IF will it put a comma between a subject clause and its verb; it will not use a comma after an introductory phrase except to show that the words are parenthetical; it never tries to replace omitted words by a comma. In these cases it shows the tendency to be rid of the superfluous commas of our grandfathers. It is even attacking (the newspapers are fairly assaulting) the comma after an introductory adverb clause that is restrictive in meaning. In one case the vote is for a comma that rhetoricians are indifferent about, before the conjunction *but.* This is practical-

ly invariable, except for contrasting two words. Every instance in which the manuals are contradictory can be decided by submitting it to the only court that has jurisdiction. A jury of twenty careful periodicals with literary motives will give at least a four-to-one verdict on any case brought before it for trial. I may agree with one of those verdicts and think another absurd; what I opine is not of the least importance. I may rebel at such decisions as are pure convention; the more fool I. In other matters I am sane; why not in this one? Though I may privately feel that lace at my wrists would emphasize my gentle breeding more than stiff cuffs, I sadly defer to society's prejudice. I ought to do the same in dressing my thoughts.

We could do much more than settle the little cases of "always yes" and "always no"; we could learn to state simple principles which will instantly furnish the "yes" or the "no" when we have defined our meaning. For example, shall there be a comma before *and*? (1) No, whenever it is clearly apparent that *and* is joining two similar units, whether words, phrases, or clauses. If the eye might at first glance suppose that *and* is joining the following word, whereas it is really adding a whole group of words, warn the eye by a comma. (2) Yes, if the two items (especially clauses) are to be shown as dissimilar in time, mood, subject, or form of emphasis. (3) Yes, if *and* is joining the last two items of a series in which the previous items are not joined by *and*.

The sum of all such trifles is a trifle. This chapter would be too trifling to print if its objective were a sheaf of rules. My aim is very different. I have in mind the fearful ignorance of college youths as

to what a decent sentence is. All instructors testify to it and are horror-struck by it. They are all but helpless before it, because the schools have given them so little foundation on which to build. Most of our colleges have to take violent measures to secure some degree of improvement. Why have the schools done so poorly? Because the textbooks say, "No definite rules can be given"; because those books that do present a fairly consistent code are unemphatic as to what virtues are cardinal, what sins are deadly; because teachers who do not know the facts of punctuation are thus encouraged in ignorance and laziness; because back of all this charming indifference to "hard-and-fast-rules" lies a most pestilential indifference to the distinction between a comma and a period; and because the anemia of that indifference produces in pupils the extreme of heedlessness and sloth. Whether good usage calls for a comma with *and* is the pettiest thing in the world; whether this group of words demands a period is the most important matter in the whole range of formal education. Until the entire body of law is known to be definite, is definitely and emphatically presented in texts, is a definitely required part of every English teacher's equipment, so long will college men be hopelessly indefinite as to the distinction between part of a sentence and two sentences.

All too well we can imagine the horrors of what injudicious persons will do when set to teaching punctuation as "a system precise in every detail." Perhaps we must acknowledge that a large part of them will regard a comma with *and* as more precious than a lively simile. But that is the fault of teach-

ers. Punctuation is no enemy to life and vigor. Any teacher whose nature would make him too zealous about commas is damned already, is already injuring young minds by the exercise of a dispiriting personality. We shall make him no worse by requiring him to teach a precise code. We shall probably make him better, for his mechanical mind will no longer be deluded by the fancy that he is dispensing a manna of grace and charm. And sensible teachers will be just as inspiring as before; you can't put their powers out of gear by asking them to impart a simple body of useful knowledge. Indeed their energy will be better directed if they are not in the dark; they will work with more assurance and peace of mind. They will give our young citizens a much better education.

I have no fear that they will repress Young America's spontaneity. I make no proposal to shackle youth with commandments or consign it to dungeons of exactitude. In no way nor in the slightest degree have I hinted at reducing freedom of expression. The severest teacher of the code might still stimulate the fullest liberty of style. There is nothing in any paragraph to discourage license of style, if that is wanted in some quarters. I have no thought of restriction. Yet I shall be so understood. There will be readers whose preconceptions will cause them to remark when they have skimmed through, "Another mechanic! Another man who would algebraicize fancy and plot the flight of winged words!" Not so. This is a gospel of freedom. Any author, young or old, is hereby urged to set down his emotions in phrases as original or graceful or lofty as his imagination can body forth. There is nothing

here to hinder even ecstasy. The most highly-wrought verse of Noyes or the most trenchant phrasing of Kipling is conveyed more tellingly because these authors have pointed according to present usage. I am only urging the necessity of recognizing usage in dealing with commas. A writer ought to choose words, not by grace of Worcester, but by knowledge of usage; so that his design will not be speckled uncouthly. He ought to put them together, not by courtesy of parsings, but by knowledge of idioms; so that his design will not be askew. And with a similar motive he ought to separate them into groups, not through fear of some "authority's" precepts, but by knowledge of what points really mean today; so that his design will stand out clear and firm.

CHAPTER VIII

PRESENT USAGE IN POINTING

This chapter is not for use in class. Many of the questions will never arise there; some of them you may never need to bother your head with. It is designed to furnish what I myself should have been so thankful for, a handy but ample record of all possible ins and outs of punctuation. If some of it strikes you at first sight as going too much into details, remember that the dictionary's three columns of sub-headed discussion of *but* was not intended to be read at one sitting. For reference purposes a summary must be complete.

The man who supervised the publishing of the *Century Dictionary,* DeVinne, got out in 1901 a chapter on punctuation; the critical reader of the *Standard Dictionary,* F. Horace Teall, published the latest edition of his manual in 1914; two Englishmen who abridged the *Oxford Dictionary* wrote a long chapter in 1906; the University of Chicago *Manual* was revised in 1915. Every rule that follows, every least comment, is in accord with one of these books; nothing of importance is in contradiction to any one of them, for there is no material difference between them. No observant eyes can look about upon present usage without seeing just what these men have seen.

It is in codifying that the differences occur. These are partly due to the kind of readers addressed.

DeVinne wrote for compositors, having in mind all conceivable kinds of printed matter; Teall is thinking of all kinds of writers. Again, there are differences due to the writers' training and kind of life, and to their mental make-ups. They attempt one of the most difficult of intellectual feats—to sort out and give an exposition of an arbitrary lot of social customs. If you have observed how some of the best-informed minds may go astray in giving an account of the uses of words, you will expect any writer on punctuation to fail in some ways to be clear or consistent or complete or shrewd in analysis. Doubtless my arrangement ramifies into too many particulars. If I were trying to inform the ignorant, I should follow a very different plan. But you are not uninformed; and, if I can judge by my own wishes when I consult books of reference, you will prefer a prolix completeness to a generalization that lacks just that particular point you wanted to make sure of.

A word as to the different manuals that may be referred to if you wish to verify or to get a different view of what follows. *Punctuation* by F. Horace Teall (Appleton) is a product of long experience; sound and sensible; it follows the plan of "reducing the number of rules to the fewest possible." *Why We Punctuate* by W. L. Klein (Lancet Pub. Co., Minneapolis) is not a ready-reference manual, but an acute analysis of the "reasons for the use of marks." *The King's English* by H. W. and F. G. Fowler has a most useful chapter on punctuation which goes at length into many moot points, illustrating in a chatty style and commenting with a good sense that never fails. It is not an orderly code for

ready reference, but is a cornucopia of wisdom. The safest, most usable, and most compendious guide is *A Manual for Writers* published by the University of Chicago Press. Its authors are Professor Manly, head of the department of English, and John Arthur Powell, an editor for the University Press.

No faith on this globe is so firmly held as that an all-embracing code cannot be framed. The first—and the last—principal or fellow-teacher that you consult will warn you against any hope of accounting in advance for "every possible case of doubt." Even Teall thinks that "probably it cannot be done." The answer is: "Try to find the case that this code does not clearly account for." Propose to your adviser that he prepare a list of five doubts, not that "could not" be provided for, but that are not actually provided for in the following summary.

You will also be warned against "rigid rules." The reply is that there is precious little rigidity about these rules, that they cannot possibly hamper or stiffen any sensible writer in the least. They merely record what points signify in current usage, and their only purpose is to enable a writer to have free trade with his reader. Ignorance of them is a very real restriction; knowledge of them is freedom from bondage.

Some of these rules (the vocative, e. g.) are pure conventions, but are so universally observed that a writer who disregards them may be thought ignorant or presumptuous. Most of them, however, can be applied only after we have answered the question, "What is the meaning?" A writer who does not know the code distorts the meaning that he wants

to convey. Hence in handling unpunctuated sentences with a class the attack must always be, "What did the author mean? What must he have meant?" If a pupil can make out any case at all to prove that those words in that order might mean what you never thought of their meaning, he must have credit. He must even be commended. A situation of that sort, where teacher expected one thing and pupil proved that quite another was possible, is often the most lively illustration to a class of the great principle: We must know what we are trying to express.

THE EXCLAMATION MARK; THE PERIOD

The exclamation mark is used after any form of sentence to show that the writer is not asking a real question or giving a real command or stating a fact or wish, but is exclaiming emotionally. It is most commonly used thus: **Oh, what a sight it was!** But it shows the point of greatest emotion, and hence there are these arrangements: **Alas! this is all too true. Good heavens! look at that! There is—alas!—no other way.** Sometimes a series of exclamations or brief questions are printed without capitals. This is because they are to appear as one sentence, as if there were semicolons between. But no semicolon or comma is ever used with the mark of exclamation or question.

Indirect questions end with a period. **I asked him what he was doing.** The period is not needed after headings nor after words written in a column; indeed such a use is offensive to most modern printers. The period is not used after contractions written with an apostrophe (i. e., the two marks are not used with the same word), nor after *12th, 2nd,* etc.

THE COMMA

Uses of the comma can be conveniently grouped under three heads, of which the third is very comprehensive.

I. *Yes, no,* and all vocatives are set off. **No, he is not here. Yes, it is difficult, my dear sir, to keep from laughing.** *Yes* and *no* may be followed by semicolons or even periods to show that they have the importance of complete statements. **No; that appears to me quite improper. Yes. After long consultation we have agreed.** No comma is used between *O* and the immediately following vocative. **O Moon, how farest thou?**

II. Words, phrases, or clauses used as unconnected, coördinate items of a series are separated. (a) Two adjectives not coördinate in descriptive value are not separated, because the first rather qualifies all that comes after it. **Pretty little flower, queer old codger.** This is extended to a series of three or even four adjectives if the writer really means to indicate that he is building up a modifying mass instead of a series of like modifiers. **That sad patient living strength** is an extreme type. (b) There may be a series of pairs. **We have to pay extra for tea and coffee, cheese and salads, fruit and sweets.** (c) When *and* is used only between the last two items, a comma must be used with it. Make this graphic to a class by showing that without the comma the series looks like $x + (y + z)$; we want it to look like $x + y + z$. (d) There is usually no comma before *and Co.,* though **Longmans, Green, and Co.** (e) In general no comma is to be used after the last item, because the meaning of such a comma would

be "this last item, or each item since the first, is parenthetical." Sometimes this effect is desired, as in **Cheerfully, even jauntily, he advanced to the scaffold.** (f) Repetition is a form of series, in which the last item may be shown as parenthetical for emphasis: **The walls, the very walls, are woven of dreams.**

(g) Mature writers who know just what they are about often employ a comma to separate independent statements that are brief, similar, and obviously parallel or contrasting in thought: **The same misleading statements continue to be made, the same exploded falsehoods continue to be repeated.** But this use is a delicate balance of meanings, and can never be tolerated in school. It is deadly there. (See a further discussion under The Semicolon.) Modern usage is chary of such a form, though it much more frequently indulges in a series of three sentences. If this is novel to you, if it seems unreasonable, forbear all logic. Accept it. It is the fact. In the *Outlook* editorials of one issue are: **Belgium was an international minor; Greece was an adult. A letter from the Chamber of Commerce is always read, accidents are discussed, and methods of prevention are taught.** It is unsafe to mention such possibilities to a class, though it may not be necessary to mark them wrong on a theme.

(h) In certain cases the comma is used with coordinating conjunctions in a series. One case has been explained (c, above). There are two others, which must be prefaced by a classification. The following are not conjunctions at all in a discussion of punctuation, but are independent adverbs, to be used after a semicolon or period: *accordingly, con-*

sequently, however, indeed, moreover, nevertheless, still, then, therefore. There is one big cause of confusion out of the way. Interwoven with it is the grammatical distinction between dependent and independent clauses. Thus *for* is regularly classified as "independent," as equivalent to "and the reason is"; while *because* is called "dependent," equivalent to "for the reason that." Similarly *though* is called dependent in a concessive use and independent when equivalent to *but.* Such demarcations are the subtlest of puzzles, beyond the province of mere grammar. They are refinements which, as Mätzner says, cannot be demonstrated in some cases. In school use *for* is regularly subordinating, *though* is coördinating. A generation ago *so* was hardly admitted to the *Century* as a conjunction; now it is in the commonest use (fearfully common in school) for *so that,* subordinating. With all these psychological values we need have no concern. All doubtful or variant functions group themselves quite naturally under III, 5, as subordinating. This section deals only with those that link or contrast two equal units. Those that link are *and, or,* and some correlatives; those that contrast are *but* and a number of others often used as equivalent: *yet, though, while,* and sometimes *nor* and *only.*

(i) The link-words are not to be pointed whenever it is easily apparent that they are joining two coördinate items in a series. This often extends to the two clauses of a short compound sentence. But if the reader might suppose that these conjunctions are joining the following word, while they really are joining a whole group, warn the eye by a comma. One or two of them had pistols, and a great many

muskets lay in a berth. The comma shows that *and* does not join *pistols* and *muskets.*

(j) If the two items (especially clauses) are to be shown as dissimilar in time, mood, subject, or form of statement, use a comma. This is often the case with *or.* **Do so at once, or you shall suffer for it.** It is most noticeable when *and* is used with another conjunction or an adverb: *and so, and hence, and then, and not.* Occasionally two coördinate words have different constructions dependent on them: **Eat, and drink this wine.**

(k) The adversatives like *but* might almost be said to demand a comma by their "inherent quality." I am only too well aware that this use is not pointed out in rhetorics and manuals, but it is everywhere scrupulously observed. "Comma before the conjunction *but*" is always to be insisted on. The following from the *Evening Post* of one issue show a universal practice: **not theories, but things; warmly human, yet critically stimulating.** Rhetorics hardly even recommend the following, but they are required by our court: **She is unconquered, not because of patriotism, but because of the Channel. Not only wasps, but all the bees.** The comma is not unusual even in **poor but honest parents.**

(l) The handy half-truth for school use is "Put a comma before the conjunction between the parts of a compound sentence." This is usually right and never entirely wrong, though it countenances such a needless comma as **His father was Irish, and his mother was Scotch.**

III. Parenthetical uses can be displayed more easily for reference by arranging them in five divi-

sions, of which the fifth presents the most difficult problem in rhetoric.

1. Appositives are set off. (a) Unless they are customarily thought of or spoken as a solid phrase, like **the poet Milton, my son John, I myself, your old wife Joan.** This last is a very questionable example, for it looks in print as if she were one of two or three wives. (b) Titles and degrees that follow a name are written as appositives. **A. C. Wyeth, M. P. J. Langdon Short, Ph. D.** (c) An appositive may have *or* before it. **Mrs. Tulliver's teraphim, or household gods.** (d) Pupils always think when studying grammar that an objective predicate is an appositive, and they sometimes point it so. **Duncan made Macbeth Thane of Cawdor.**

2. The successive items of an address and of a date are set off. **Goldsmith was born at Pallas, County Longford, Ireland, on November 10, 1728, the fifth of eight children.** (a) The comma before the name of a state is usually said to show an omitted *in,* but commas are not used nowadays to show omissions. Moreover the "omission" idea does not account for the comma after the state; it is "both sides" that needs emphasis. (b) No comma is used between the month and the day of the month, nor in such a form as **in the year 1782,** nor between the number and the street, nor before B.C., A.M., etc. (c) The majority of letter-writers and nearly all stenographers put commas at the ends of lines when such items occur as the heading of a letter; almost as great a majority still use them in addressing an envelope. But the use is old-fashioned, is not in favor among those whose opinion is worth most, and is sure to die before long. Such

commas accomplish nothing but unsightliness. Periods for abbreviations must be used at the ends of lines.

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3. Words, phrases, and clauses used somewhat parenthetically are set off. Specially common examples are *however, nevertheless, too, then, indeed, in fact, in the second place, it seems, they say.* (a) *However* is nearly always parenthetical, but no expression is in itself parenthetical. There can never be any rule about what must be done with this word or that phrase; it is always a question of "Do I wish to have this understood as parenthetical?" (b) The best judgment of today is to be sparing about pointing such modal adverbs as *indeed, perhaps, possibly,* because they are much more likely to be close modifiers in the writer's actual thought, and because if he insists on expressing himself with so many jerky asides he tires us. In the following the writers are most likely using the words parenthetically: **There is, indeed, no other possible reason. It is conceivable, perhaps, that Jane lied. Scott may have decided, possibly, that suicide was justifiable.** In the following the words are close modifiers: **Indeed you may. You can perhaps be of some assistance. There may possibly be a better road.** There is a story of an eminent university official who called up an editor's office to say that he feared he had omitted the commas with a *perhaps,* his notion being that the word, not the thought, required point-

ing. (c) Always think of such words and phrases as questions of "both sides." Never discuss them as introductory. If they begin a sentence, their position does not necessitate a comma; it is a matter of whether they would have two commas if they were transplanted to the middle of the sentence. This "both sides" idea is most important also with terminal expressions, as will be seen when it comes to the dash. You and your pupils will always be in danger unless your test is "How would it be in the middle of the sentence?" (d) Phrases are never pointed because they are introductory. Pupils are passionately fond of that comma and can with difficulty be reconciled to omitting it after even such a brief phrase as **In 1856 he sailed for Europe;** much less are they content with **Through the plate-glass windows of his office in the tenth story of the Metropolitan Building we could see her funnels.** But no comma is called for after *Building.* The modern notion is that phrases ought not to be "out of their natural order," that a writer ought to place them coherently, that commas would usually belie his real meaning by indicating that the phrase is parenthetical. (e) Occasionally a well-placed phrase may happen to create a misunderstanding of construction—e. g., **In comparison with this more expensive food means nothing,** where at first glance a reader might think it was *this food.* So the eye might erroneously read *greeting on the deck* in the following: **But during all the greeting on the deck lies the body of the dead captain.** Modern usage tolerates a comma in such predicaments if there is real need of disjoining a modifier—not otherwise. Real need is rare. In **This, Gareth hearing and**

King, of the Khyber Rifles the authors have done their readers a doubtful service. (f) *Etc.* is always considered parenthetical; also conversational *well* and *why* at the beginning of a sentence; and usually conversational *now* is pointed to distinguish it from the adverb of time. **Well, what do you say? Why, I hardly know. Now, that is just the point.**

4. Participial and other adjectival expressions that modify in an appositive way are set off. **But Nat, fearing some trick, would not enter. My wife, pale and trembling, clasped her little ones. Struck by this answer, the judge paused.** (a) Such participles are extremely common in themes—altogether too common. For pupils who have had Latin see and hear ablative absolutes so constantly that they slip into the way of requiring all sorts of work from an English participle, work for which our verbal is not strong enough—e. g., **Trudging along wearily, after a sleepless night, no farm-house was anywhere to be seen.** (b) Participles are often predicate adjectives or objective predicates and not to be set off: **The wind goes whistling. The rope could be seen dangling. We found him hunting.** (c) They are often close modifiers: **The man walking on the other side sees us.** (d) By a curious perversity pupils who are careless about **Rounding the buoy, we started for home** will put a comma in **After rounding the buoy we started for home** or in **Rounding the buoy was not difficult.** (e) Sometimes an *ing* word that looks like such a participle is in meaning an ellipsis for a closely-modifying clause: **Coming down he felt all right** (="when he was coming down"). (f) Non-restrictive phrases are to be set off: **His legs were thick, like an alligator's.**

The scenery was placid, with now and then some cottages. The room in which he sat, with its simple furniture. The scenery was not "placid with cottages"; the man did not "sit with furniture." But non-restrictive phrases seldom have a right to exist; they usually result from ambiguous arrangement of words. (g) In a sentence like the following the comma is often omitted before the participle: **He was fagged out; but wishing to be polite, he began a conversation.** This is to show that *wishing* is not parenthetical after *but;* it is appositive before *he.* For school use, however, such a nicety should not be mentioned. "Both sides" is your maxim.

5. Non-restrictive clauses are set off. **Though he was dishonest, he was loyal. We were led to a little clearing, where the children had a play-house.** These often appear as introductory or terminal, are often so classified; but ought to be thought of as somewhat parenthetical, as "both sides" matters. The great question always is "Does the clause modify closely?" There is no universal formula for getting the answer. The most generally applicable test that I know is "Does the clause mean *that particular one* or *that particular kind of*?" As a matter of fact we adults "feel" that it is not restrictive, and our account of that feeling is likely to be that there is a slight pause in reading. There is a pause; that is a pretty sure test for us. But this is vague, very often misleading, and it encourages that deadly comma-shows-a-pause notion. Again, we analyze our feeling by saying that the clause is not so essential to the principal idea, that taking it out would not detract essentially; whereas the removal of a restrictive clause leaves a mere

grammatical skeleton like **Make hay** or **No boy can be popular.** But this too is vague and is seldom useful. For us and for the pupils there is only one test that I have yet discovered: *that particular one.* It applies to all varieties of clauses—thus: (1) "for that particular reason", (2) "at that particular time when", (3) "at that particular place where", (4) "for the particular purpose of", (5) "with that particular man who", (6) "in the particular way that." Examples are: (1) **They fight because they are attacked,** (2) **He came when we were sitting down to dinner,** (3) **Look in the drawer where he keeps his money,** (4) **He died that we might be saved,** (5) **We finally detected the man who was making the trouble,** (6) **They were grouped as actors are at the end of a play.** But notice how *as* adds another idea in the following: **They were grouped with reference to an audience, as actors are at the end of a play.** A pupil who has learned that trick of experimenting by saying "that particular" before the antecedent of the clause may conquer a mystery that would otherwise forever baffle him. I speak of it at length because I searched so long before I found it, and after I had it for relatives was still another couple of years in applying it to all the others.

Pupils always hope for a rule that there must be a comma before *because, where,* etc. There is no such thing. The writer must decide whether he means *for the particular reason that, at the particular place where.* Bright students will see the absurdity of "Don't go for the particular reason that you might catch smallpox" or "He lived in that particular Florida where there is never any

ice." When dull ones think these sound rational, try the alternatives: "Don't go, and the reason for not going is" and "He lived in Florida, and there is never any ice there." They are always to inquire whether it seems more like *that particular* or like *and,* whether it limits closely or is added on. The "added on" test may prove more convincing for such restrictive clauses as **I have a ring which my father used to wear. We found a restaurant where there was no orchestra.** Sometimes the truth is readily apparent from the direct question—the fundamental one—"Does it modify closely? Does it 'run along solid' in meaning?"

If this seems to you like depending, after all, on "Is there a pause?" be warned that it is nothing of the kind. If you can leave the whole non-restrictive problem half taught (and many schools have to), the pause explanation is the primrose path. But it is the path of endless error. Compare the time-halt before the two following clauses from Kipling and see how debatable the questions of pointing remain:

> And once from the north where he had doubled back eight hundred miles.
>
> "There is no holding the young pony from the game," said the horse-dealer when the Colonel pointed out that vagabonding was absurd.

How *you* will pause, because you detect which clause is restrictive, is not the point. What will the pupil do when he is *trying to find out* which is restrictive? But as soon as you apply "from that particular north where" and "at that particular time when the Colonel pointed out," you will get light. I can testify that the hour when I first saw the value of

this test marks an epoch in my experience. Before that I could never make headway.

(a) The following always introduce non-restrictive clauses: (1) *as* and (2) *since* showing a reason, (3) *for,* (4) *so* and *so that* showing result. (1) **He refused to join us, as he was suspicious of our purpose.** The omission of this comma before "*as* that shows a reason" is the sure mark of an uneducated or unsensitive mind, and is an extremely common fault in school composition. (2) **Since there's no help, come, let us kiss and part.** (3) **Don't hurry, for you have plenty of time.** (4) **The porter had been most unobliging, so we gave him no tip. The natives were in an ugly mood, so that our plight was really serious.** *So that* showing purpose may occasionally be restrictive. **The dance was cut short so that we might take the midnight boat** (i. e., "in order that we might").

(b) Some novelists and all secondary students are excessively fond of additive *whens* and *wheres.* **In this manner we all sat ruminating upon schemes of vengeance, when the other little boy came running in. Her object was to gain a small port about two leagues distant, where she had provided a vessel for her escape.** If used, they must have the comma, and the necessity for the comma can best be shown by explaining them as equivalent to *and then, and there.*

(c) The relative *that* is usually restrictive, though non-restrictive uses are not rare. **This is the cat that ate the rat that lived in the house that Jack built.** *Whoever, whatever,* etc., are always restrictive if they are relatives. **Whoever did such a deed ought to confess** (in which *whoever* is

a relative, having for its antecedent the understood *he* that is the subject of *ought*). **Whatever he puts his strong hand to is sure to succeed.** But in such constructions as **Whoever he is, I'm not afraid of him** the *whoever* clause is adverbial, modifying *am*.

(d) Noun clauses used as subject or object should never be set off. **That my colleague and I should have decided to leave our usual guide at home during the one successful trip of the year seemed a perversity of fate.** They may be long, the eye may need a rest, there may be a pause, many editors still use a comma after a long subject, most rhetorics prefer it —in spite of all those pseudo-reasons the practice is so antagonistic to present notions that it is surely dying, is all but dead. Even in such occasional oddities as **Whatever is is right** it is better not to try to make a comma do what it is not fitted to do. The *Century* prints the quotation "That that is is" without a comma. Noun clauses used as appositives are not set off except for giving the effect of "namely" or "as follows." **The idea that the earth is round was not original with Columbus. No saying was oftener in his mouth than that fine apothegm of Bentley, that no man was ever written down but by himself.**

(e) Clauses of comparison introduced by *than*, *so . . . that*, *as . . . as* are not pointed. **He was so much engrossed in his delicate task of measuring the infinitesimal difference that he did not look up.**

(f) The introductory adverb clause is about the only matter in which present usage is not settled. **When the Mogul asks for the rents which were reserved to him by that very grant, he is told that he is a mere pageant.** (An adverb clause is the only

kind that can properly be called "introductory.") Introductory phrases used to be pointed, and to this day there is a very prevalent feeling that if they are long they should have the comma. But the modern system knows nothing about relative length; it is based on disjunction in meaning, and it rules that after a coherent introductory phrase there is no disjunction. All signs are that the clause is going the same course. Most careful weeklies still insert the comma, but the newspapers are indifferent to it; and newspapers have thus far in history infallibly shown what the conservatives were going to do later. Their editors are studious to make matter easy to read, are more sympathetic, can venture to try experiments, watch each other's style shrewdly, adopt readily what proves advantageous. One of the most conservative punctuators in the country has declared that what the dailies do now the weeklies will soon be doing. Hence little attention need be paid to pointing an introductory clause, though it is still common custom. I require it in exercises, but do not follow it up much. Even conservatives will not find fault with an uncommaed clause if it is in any sense restrictive. Introductory clauses with *as, since,* and *though* are always pointed, and *if* clauses usually are. However, in the following example the *if* clause is so close a modifier within the *that* clause that most journalists would not like to break up the coherence with a comma: **The modern notion is that if a phrase is out of its natural order a writer has been clumsy.** A similar case is seen in **The police, or "bulls" as he calls them, are friendly.** A comma before *as* would be logical, but would deceive the eye by breaking the continuity of the whole interjected expression.

If an author wishes a comma in such a parenthesis, he should use dashes to set off the whole. **The police —or "bulls," as he calls them—are friendly.**

(g) **And even if you can't see why, do as I ask.** There would be reason in putting commas around the *if* clause, but the reasons against it are stronger: (1) The clause would look parenthetical, (2) *and* is not joining simply *do as I ask,* but the whole conditional complex idea. The comma after such an initial conjunction is omitted.

(h) The main clause that introduces a direct quotation is set off. **"Quit worrying," said he, "and go to work."** No capital is used after the interrupting words, but the beginning of the quotation is capitalized. **He shouted across the water, "We've lost an oar."** No comma is used with another point, such as a question mark. **"Where are we?" he whispered. "Oh, you scoundrel!" she hissed.** An indirect quotation is regularly left unpointed nowadays; quotation marks were formerly frequent in novels. **I declared that my only wish was to help him.** No comma or capital should be used with a quoted expression that is used as a component part of the sentence. **The statement that we have "moiled and pothered too long" is only partially true.**

(i) Pupils of intelligence have often formed the habit of putting a comma at the beginning of a line. They will agree that this is absurd—and then do it again the next week.

(j) When in doubt as to using a comma, don't.

THE SEMICOLON

The semicolon is used between the items of a series if one of the items contains a comma. **A civic digni-**

tary, being ill, and fanciful in proportion, went from doctor to doctor; and having arrived at death's door, sent for Peter. This is not necessarily because of the importance of the items, but in order that a sentence may not appear divided into more parts than it actually contains, in order that the main parts may be easily recognizable. The stock illustration is an editorial type of sentence containing three members, each of which has commas within it. Needless to say, students seldom compose in that style. This principle of the "one commaed item" is applied by heedful writers to compound sentences whose brevity might not seem to require a semicolon. Glance at the following: **This must sound queer to you, and even though I had leisure to explain, you might not be convinced.** It appears at first glance to consist of three coördinate clauses, but in fact there are only two. A semicolon before *and* is preferable, not because of the length of what follows, but because at that point there is greater disjunction of meaning than after *explain.* The idea could have been well applied to the following, quoted from a writer whose style is usually crisp and clear: **More and more he was being forgotten, though, he saw, and it was this which troubled him.** The same rule that was given for a commaed series holds for a semicoloned series: if only the last two items are joined by *and,* the semicolon must be used with it. **I saved his life from a bear; he mine in the Rhine, for he swims like a duck and I like a hod o' bricks; and we saved one another's lives at an inn in Burgundy.**

Its great use is to show that sentences grammatically independent are closely connected in thought. **He can't hear; he's deaf.** The struggle to plant that

conception in young minds is harder and very much more important than any other labor in composition. We have seen that the principal objective of grammar is that conception. It could almost be said that the aim of all drill in punctuation is to know what commas are, so that they will not be used to separate sentences. No other idea in rhetoric has a tithe of the importance that attaches to *grammatically independent, though connected in thought.* It would be difficult to overstate either the value or the difficulty of establishing this notion as a habit of mind, so that a pupil will jump if he finds himself about to commit the high crime.* The work should be done mostly in the grammar grades, and some time it will be; but at present college instructors have to battle against sentence-errors.

One device that helps is to present correct forms in pairs:

The deer paused; this was what I expected.
The deer paused, which was what I expected.

We needn't run; it's not late.
We needn't run, for it's not late.

Teach that the comma alone will never do; there must be either a semicolon, or a comma with a conjoining word.

The converse kind of sentence-error—pointing a phrase or clause with a semicolon—is not so common on themes. In unpunctuated exercises the most usual sort of unwariness is with participial expressions like *the stores being so low that they feared starvation.*

*See the sixth paragraph of the Introduction for a striking proof of the importance that attaches to this notion in French education.

Make these two uses of the semicolon picturesque by calling them the "double-comma" and the "half-period." The most useful maxim is "A semicolon never introduces anything." Pupils are fond of putting it after *My dear Sir* and before a quotation.

So much for pedagogy. Only a few comments are required on usage. In its "half-period" function a semicolon always signifies that what follows is to be understood as having the value of an independent predication, though it may not be one grammatically. Hence authors who wish to be impressive sometimes separate a series of phrases, or even single words, by this heavy stop.

Especially common (and often effective in skilful hands) is the use before coördinating conjunctions, and sometimes before subordinating words. This says to a reader, "Regard what follows as equivalent to an independent statement." But pupils must not be allowed to put a semicolon before subordinate expressions. Tell them that they may exercise their esthetic judgment after they have graduated from college. The word following is never capitalized. Yet a semicolon is regarded as so much like a period that dashed-off words do not require the second dash. **He had been defeated—as was expected; he retrieved himself—which was not expected.** Before a conjunction may be placed a comma or semicolon or period; it is a matter of the degree of independence that is to be indicated.

THE COLON

The colon formally introduces a list of particulars. **The following translation is intended primarily for two classes of readers: first, for those who desire to**

obtain knowledge of its contents; second, for those who—etc. For the pointing of an introductory word before it see the discussion under The Dash. It is also used in a very significant way before a sentence: it indicates that the following statement is in apposition with what precedes, is explaining concretely what has been put in general terms. **But the curse is at work: the severance between good and evil cannot be closed again, and the tragic end comes in spite of the efforts of Arthur and Launcelot.** This use contributes to precision in an analytical style. A capital after the colon signifies that what follows is quoted or is of independent importance. **Right here a baffling question arises: How can any inheritance-tax prevent a man from giving property to his children before he dies?** The colon is the commonest and best mark after the salutation of a letter. A dash after it is unsightly and is going out of favor. It is useful for introducing long or important quotations. It always carries the connotation "as follows." The colon is omitted if it would have to be combined with a question mark. **What did the candidate mean by beginning his composition as follows? "Caesar! Julius Caesar! That ironic, sartorial virgin of history!"**

QUOTATION MARKS

(a) There is no indication that single marks are coming into favor. The all but universal practice is to use single marks for a quotation within a quotation. A quotation within a quoted quotation (if one must ever write such a thing) has double marks. No sensible author would write such a tangle as the following, though it is logically possible: "Well,"

said he, "why do you keep repeating, 'We heard the old man cry, "Make way for liberty!" '?" A typographer would balk at this and would go insane if he had to publish that row of terminations. Such puzzles originate only in puzzled brains. (b) Ordinarily quotation marks are outside a mark of interrogation or exclamation, but are inside if the mark of emotion is not a part of the quotation. **If only you had not said, "I am indifferent"! John asked, "Did you hear me say, 'Come on'?"** (c) If the introducing words are at the end of a line, the comma must be after them on that line and the quotation marks at the beginning of the next line. (d) The greatest difficulty in themes is with such a quotation as "Come in here," he said. "It's warmer." A comma for a period there has the primal, eldest curse upon it. It is the unforgivable sin. (e) If a speaker's sentence is interrupted, left unfinished, use a long dash and put the quotation marks after the dash. **"Look!" he gasped. "Well, did ——"** No period is needed.

PARENTHESES

Parentheses show an explanation of some word or statement. Since a necessity of stopping to explain suggests involved thought, our quick-moving, straightforward generation is impatient of parentheses. They are at present being supplanted by dashes.

Except for enumeration in scholarly works they always appear as a pair of marks following the matter that is being commented on. Hence their function is peculiarly plain, and there is almost complete

agreement as to punctuation connected with them. This was not always so. As late as 1881 Bigelow's handbook enjoined the following pointing: **Fifteen pauls, (a scudo and a half,) buonomano included.** This is copied from the Riverside edition of Lowell of 1892. Nowadays we should never see anything but **Fifteen pauls (a scudo and a half), buonomano included.** Such a bit of ancient history would deserve no mention here if it were not that this puzzling doubled comma still persists to some extent in connection with a pair of dashes. The curious perversity with parentheses has been duly buried; the same perversity with dashes is dead, but not yet committed to the grave.

The universal present ruling for parentheses is to use exactly the same points, in the same ways, that would appear if the parenthesis were removed. The matter between the marks is punctuated just as it would be if it were not parenthetical, except that a sentence is not capitalized and that a terminal comma is not used **(set on by Wakem, of course).** Of course an independent sentence made parenthetical between two sentences begins with a capital and has its terminal point inside the second parenthesis. **"Come here at once." (You can't imagine my speaking so firmly?) "What have you done?"** Within a sentence there never can be any point just before the parentheses, except in some extraordinary case, like **If he comes, (do you) let me know.**

Pupils seldom have a real need for parentheses. Indeed they rather need to be discouraged from such asides, because they easily fall into the way of using an aimless "as I said before" or "I forgot to say that." They will most awkwardly prevent ambig-

uity of pronouns by repeating in parenthesis the very noun for which they have used a pronoun. And they are very fearful that after they have been speaking of a character his name will not be known to apply to him; hence they wearisomely append "that was my hero's name."

THE DASH

Writers whose habits were fixed more than thirty years ago regard the dash as somewhat sensational, and will employ it very sparingly or not at all in formal composition. It has an emotional function, to indicate abruptly-changed constructions or unexpected turns of thought. **"I tell thee men will laugh —ah!" She ended in a little scream. The—but, pooh!—it is not for an old man like me,** etc.

But in the last quarter-century dashes have been almost universally adopted as a convenient mark of parenthesis. **Unless Carranza should do what he has never succeeded yet in doing—establish a competent government and maintain order—the next duty would be to occupy strategic centers.** A pair of dashes shows matter that is more necessary to convey the real thought, that is less like a pure explanation or an aside. Dashes are less formal than parentheses, do not show such aloofness. They have grown in favor so much that nowadays almost every page of staid editorials furnishes examples. The commonest form of this use is when the dashed-off matter is at the end of the sentence. **Two of the members have opposed the action of the majority—Governor Montague and Representative Shirley.** This is so frequent in all editorials, rhetorics, and literature of today that it is thought of by many as a distinctive

form. In reality it is only a species of the parenthetical.

It would be logical to use a comma after the second dash in cases where the comma would be required if the dashed-off matter were removed, as in **If you can —and I hope you can—, we shall be much pleased.** This would be exactly like the use with parentheses. But the comma looks so remote and dangling that printers were never willing to put it there; instead they evolved a practice of reduplicating, placing a comma before each dash. These commas were completely unreasonable and never assisted the eye, but previous to 1880 few American publishers dared omit them, and to this day there are unobservantly conservative people to whom the custom is very dear. Yet the custom is thoroughly dead, though the ghost of it may be seen lingering in the *Atlantic,* the *Century,* the *North American Review,* and a few college journals. The *New York Evening Post,* a most conservative journal, abandoned the combination so many years ago that the present proofreaders know nothing about it. Another theory expressed in some rhetorics is that a dash "strengthens" the comma, yet even the *Atlantic* and the *Century* offices deny all knowledge of such a use. In the spring of 1916 the *Atlantic* quit the use of "strengtheners," and the *Review of Reviews* abandoned the "comma-dash" entirely. The combination is not tolerated by the author of any good manual published since 1900 except Klein, and he admits a "quite general" usage opposed to his preference. The dash should never be used with a comma or semicolon.

The most singular way in which rhetorics have lagged a generation behind actual practice is in ad-

vising a semicolon before such introductory words as *namely* and *e.g.*, where present usage puts a dash. They rehearse this Wilsonian rule as trustingly as though their highest duty was to be blind to facts. One author recited this credo in 1910, but omitted it in his edition of 1914; and two other good books have rejected it. All must discard it soon, for it is an utter untruth.

It originated quite naturally from such a form as this: **He is not popular; that is, he is not in the public eye.** Here the explanation is put in the form of an independent, coördinate statement. *That is* may be employed so, frequently to the extent of beginning a new sentence. Similarly it may be argued that *namely* and words of that kind are elliptical for *these are by name* or *these are as follows.* If they are thus understood and if they are always employed at the end of a sentence, a semicolon is a reasonable mark. It is utterly unreasonable under any other conditions. (1) If you should wish to put the appositive matter within the sentence, you would have to surround it with a pair of semicolons, as is actually done in a remarkable quotation in Johnson's Dictionary under *namely.* But no rhetorician has the hardihood to do this; in his own text he at once employs a pair of dashes, putting a comma after the *namely.* **There is one argument—namely, the increase of wages—which is peculiarly appealing.** And this is the fact of modern usage. (2) If there is no *namely* (or any such word as *viz., to wit, as*), the semicolon would become monstrous, for it would then appear as a mark of introduction, as a colon. Such a function it has never had. No rhetorician will ever use it so in his writing. (3) To insist (as we must) that a semi-

colon never introduces, and then to teach that it introduces a list of particulars with *namely,* is pedagogic crime. It is curious to see how several modern text-makers forget their rule and exhibit present usage in the body of their work by employing the dash constantly before appositive constructions, even before the very words that they have listed under their semicolon rule. (4) The semicolon rule is contrary to facts. I have examined two yards of grammars and dictionaries without finding such a use in any book less than fifty years old. Of course it appears not infrequently when an old-fashioned writer's copy is being followed; even in *Outlook* and *Post* it is seen occasionally to introduce the equivalent of a statement. Otherwise it is a ghost of a former reality.

The introductory word can be found punctuated with every possible permutation of comma, dash, and colon, but there is no body of usage to support most of these variations. It is unusual to find the colon before or the dash after, and it is illogical. If a handbook to which you are referring advises on page 10 that a colon should precede *viz.,* look on pages 55 and 56, where you will see the colon quite properly after *viz.* and *thus,* and always after *as follows. Namely* (which I use to represent all such words) need not be considered parenthetical, and often is not in scholarly works that have to eliminate as many points as possible; personally I wish the world had taken this cue from the scholars; but it has not; in ordinary composition *namely* is parenthetical. The choice between comma and colon to follow *namely* is entirely a matter of how formal the introduction is to be. Hence we have the simple and

obvious principle that there is a big disjunction before *namely* (to point off all that follows), and a small disjunction after *namely* (to set off that mere word). This shows how ambiguous is the very common practice of using a comma both before and after, which ought to mean that *namely* could be taken out without destroying the continuity. That is what the commas really do mean in the following: **We have one great fear—the fear, namely, that you will desert us.** That is precisely what they do not mean in the following: **But it does indicate something else, namely, an expectation that they can succeed.** Both the logic and the facts of present usage call for a dash before this last *namely* and a comma after it. A comma before and a colon after *to wit* and *viz.* are common today, especially in legal phrasing; but the comma is a weak mark for such a position. The dash is normal.

Present usage reduces to one simple ruling: Put a dash before and a comma after; use the colon after to show importance or formality. This is simple; it is consistent with the facts and the reasoning of modern usage; it is always applicable, whether the appositive matter is terminal or medial, whether or not there is an introductory word.

Perhaps the most useful function of dashes and parentheses is to prevent a confusing array of commas that are performing different grades of duty, as in **He sometimes served a plain dinner, a veal pie, or a leg of lamb, and a rice pudding.** A dash after *dinner* would show that that word is not the first of four coördinate items. In the following each comma is properly employed, but the whole series is bewildering: **Only four Republicans, Coates, Grattan,**

Holden, and Kissel, upheld him, the other four votes coming from Grady, Frawley, and Sullivan, Tammany members, and Cullen of Queens.

Dashes, parentheses, and quotation marks are the only points allowed at the beginning of a line.

Only occasionally will you encounter any punctuation puzzle that is not definitely provided for above. There is always the possibility of some absurd construction which could be indicated only by absurd pointing—e.g., **Why do you ask, "May I come in?"?** In the first place, that last question mark is patently nonsensical. In the second place, it is the construction that is faulty; no one ought to desire to show that two questions end simultaneously. So always.

You may perchance be told that there are two schools of punctuation—"open" and "close"; that the former means getting rid of all possible points; that its vogue is chiefly in slap-dash newspapers; that the latter is more refined and is cultivated in the college world; that the author of *What Is English?* is a devotee of the open system. Very little is heard of those terms nowadays, for they merely described a revolution (begun in the 60's and concluded in the 90's) against the copious Wilsonian commas. I am a devotee of nothing but the safest and soundest present usage. No jot or tittle of personal preference has been admitted to this chapter. The code here presented is conservative, would have to be called close.

Don't lug much of the treatise into class. It doesn't belong there. It is only to furnish you complete knowledge for emergencies, just as a dictionary tells you thousands of things that never come up in recitations—but they might. You need to know

beforehand. The few big matters in school are quotations; both sides of non-restrictive matter; comma before *but, so, for, as*; the difference between a comma and a period. This last is worth much more than all the rest together.

CONSPECTUS OF PUNCTUATION RULES

[Except for period, question mark, exclamation mark, and quotation marks. Numbers of subheadings do not correspond to the numbering in the Chapter.]

COMMA

Never used in connection with another mark of punctuation.

I. Independent Elements Set Off

1. *Ah* and *oh* when these are followed by exclamatory expressions.
2. *Yes* and *no*.
3. Nouns of address (not after *O*).

II. Items of a Series Separated

1. Unconnected, coördinate words, phrases, or clauses (but successive adjectives are often not coördinate in value).
2. Three or more (rarely two) short and similar independent statements.
3. With *and* or *or*:
   a. Between last two items if there is no conjunction between previous items.

b. Between clauses if it is needful to warn a reader that the conjunction is not connecting merely two words.

c. Between clauses to show that they are dissimilar in subject, mood, time, etc.

4. Before the adversatives *but, while, though, yet, not, nor* when they introduce clauses.

III. Parenthetical Uses

1. Appositives, unless they form customary phrases.

2. Appositive adjective expressions, especially participial phrases.

3. Successive terms in dates and addresses (these not being "coördinate items," but successive explanations — parenthetical); not to be used at the end of a line in a letterhead or on an envelope.

4. Any word, phrase, or very brief clause that is to be shown as merely interjected: always *etc.*; nearly always *however* and such introducing words as *namely, e.g.*; usually conversational *why, well,* and *now.*

5. Modifying prepositional phrases that are not restrictive in meaning (these are rare).

6. Modifying clauses which are not restrictive in meaning—i.e., which are equivalent to a statement added with *and*: always with *as, since,* and *for* showing a reason; with *so* and *so that* showing result.

7. After introductory adverb clause: always with *as, since, though,* and *although*; usually with *if*; otherwise not necessary if the clause is to be shown as restrictive in meaning.

8. The main clause that introduces a quotation, but not in combination with a question mark or exclamation mark.

SEMICOLON

1. Separates coördinate expressions if one of these contains a comma—the "double comma" use.

2. Separates sentences that are closely connected in thought—the "half period" use.

3. Shows that words, phrases, or dependent clauses are to be regarded as having the importance of independent statements.

COLON

Always equivalent to "as follows." Introduces a list of particulars, or a sentence that explains particularly a general statement. May be used before a quotation or after such words as *namely* to show that what follows is formally introduced, as being long or important.

A semicolon between two statements means that they are coördinate in value; a colon means that the following statement explains or gives the particulars of the preceding statement.

PARENTHESES

Indicate added information, not strictly essential to the meaning.

DASH

1. Shows an abruptly changed construction or an uncompleted statement.
2. Shows an appositive expression more abrupt or interjected than would be indicated by a comma.
3. Useful for an appositive expression that contains a comma.
4. A pair of dashes shows a modifying side-remark.
5. A pair of dashes is specially common for appositive matter introduced by such words as *namely, e.g.* Such matter is commonly at the end of a sentence, and hence only one dash appears.

Only dashes, parentheses, and quotation marks may stand at the beginning of a line.

CHAPTER IX

THEMES

One of the best high schools in the country used to have an arrangement by which English teachers were given a mathematics class in order that this easier work might relieve the tedium of theme-reading. It is a labor from which many teachers shrink. If this chapter can show two ways of making it lighter and more effective, your peace of mind will be conserved and your energy better applied.

During the last few years there has been a great deal of discussion about how to grade themes. Every experimenter has produced an astounding result like this: twenty themes were submitted to ten teachers for grading; the marks on one theme varied between 25 and 90; two given themes were marked 60 and 90 by A, 80 and 50 respectively by B; discrepancies in the same teaching force, among instructors supposed to be familiar with a common system, showed bewilderingly variant estimates. The English world has been puzzling about uniformity; about a criterion; about some way of getting a body of intelligent teachers to agree that a given theme is very poor, just passing, or very good. In universities where twenty or thirty freshman instructors are reading one huge set of themes from one class for one kind of credit it has been absolutely essential to issue particular instructions, which readers have had to follow pre-

cisely; any other procedure, any trusting to individual taste, would be criminally unfair.

Yet the universal assumption until very recently has been that a theme, like a story in a magazine, is in the last analysis ungradable; that it is an expression of a personality, making one appeal to A and a very different appeal to B; that there is no possibility of a uniform rating of its merits. Most editors and superintendents and business men and clergymen still take it for granted that the mark on a theme is a literary evaluation. Perhaps you have taken that for granted. The first half dozen rhetorics you examine will convey the same impression by speaking of "self-expression" and "polishing our work." The most ambitious effort to get some uniformity-criterion, a scale devised by Professor Hillegas of Columbia, is based on the same assumption. It is in effect a set of selections graduated in literary merit from the zero of a thoughtless child to the 100% of a Hawthorne; with this set of selections the theme-reader is to familiarize himself; then after a quick perusal of any composition he can estimate that its merit is nearer that of no. 7 than of no. 6, and hence marks it 70. This is delightfully easy, is alluring, and has received a great deal of attention from reviewers and conventions; but I do not hear that it is actually being used much. If it were a practical device, it would be as handy as a gravity-bulb for quick and precise measure of literary value.

That is just the point: it is largely an esthetic measure. Is that what needs measuring in school themes? Are we in the position of an editor deciding whether an article is worth purchasing? He thinks of four counts: strength of subject, charm of

style, coherence and emphasis of structure, accuracy in such petty mechanics as idiom and sentence-structure. Spelling and punctuation are less than nothing in his consideration, for a twenty-dollar-a-week proofreader can attend to such minutiae. An editor can easily revise poor syntax and diction if there is not too much of it. As to orderly structure of the whole, it is likely that any contributor who has a message and some stylistic ability will have composed his matter effectively, or that he could, at the editor's suggestion, alter any carelessness of arrangement. The editor is simply judging whether the MS. offers an interesting expression of personality.

But every conscientious band of freshman instructors finds that it has to pass the opposite kind of opinion. We have heard the explicit announcement from Wisconsin and Illinois; the facts are undoubtedly the same at any college where honest effort is guided by clear apprehension of facts. We are not concerned with elective courses whose objective is literary knack; we speak of work required of *all* freshmen. What is true for them must be more true of the first years of high school. *All* pupils do not have literary skill. Only a small percentage of them have. Quite a proportion of teachers have only a tincture of such talent. You very likely were on the board of the *Ulula* and you have sent a story to *Scribner's* and an essay to the *Atlantic*. But you are unusual. We average teachers have small hopes of literary fame. If we strive to write gracefully, we are apt to appear affected. If we suppose that we must teach pupils to write gracefully, we shall teach them affectation. We shall probably do a much worse thing—convince them that we are insincere

and that all our talk about Addisonian charm is pretense. Our first business is care and accuracy.

It is well to say frequently to yourself and occasionally to the class that you cannot require a pleasing style, for that is an innate quality; that you cannot teach more than some faintest hints of what constitutes a pleasing style, for that is unteachable; that perhaps a few in the class were born with a degree of power that is greater than the teacher's, just as every now and then some school football-player is born to be a college player of more strength than his present coach. What most do not possess, what cannot be taught, you have no right to require; it is folly to require it. But what every ordinary child can do, what his parents and employer insist upon, what he must learn if he is to graduate, is to avoid hideous errors of spelling and sentence-structure, and to acquire some ability to divide into paragraphs and to proceed in a somewhat orderly fashion to a conclusion.

One man's private judgment about this is worth almost nothing. Don't take stock in the previous paragraphs just because they are in a printed book. There is some contrary evidence—for example, one teacher of girls testifies that she divides the school for English work, not by regular classification, but by literary ability. I should guess that a majority of principals and parents still think that themes ought to be graded for style. Don't oppose the opinion of those in authority at Smithboro. Find out what is wanted and follow orders. Find out definitely, or definitely interpret for yourself, what is the limit of deduction from an orderly and pleasing theme for mere mechanical errors. Inquire for that

form of directions; decide clearly in your own mind according to that form. If a theme is reasonably well arranged and is not dull, it deserves 100 as a piece of school literature; how much may be taken off for mechanical errors if the passing mark is 70? The answer from the universities, from the college board, from the careful preparatory schools, is "enough to make the mark zero." But the Smithboro school may be crowded, so that most students must be promoted, and hence marking must be lenient; or, again, Smithboro may have an old-fashioned horror of mechanics, so that the instructions may be "never more than 30." Then you are to resolve privately that you will never deduct for mere prosiness and will seldom deduct more than 20 for ordinary incoherence or lack of emphasis. One other preliminary question you are to get answered: How strict is the grading in this school? Compare notes with colleagues during the opening weeks, so as to make sure that your marks are not noticeably high or low.

You have now assured yourself peace of mind by taking theme-grading out of the region of guess and mystery and worriment and setting up an arithmetical standard. In so doing you are not professing that you have equated charms and commas or established a percentage basis for personality. You have declined that impossible task. You have simply refused to put English on grounds that no other subject stands on. You have safeguarded your own fairness; you will be able to tell both Willie and his perplexed mother just why the mark was E. If any doubt of the justice of this arithmetic haunts you, reflect that our whole system of rating intellectual achievement is utterly inadequate; every year we

refuse to graduate able citizens and give valedictory honors to those who can contribute little to civilization. But this is the best adjustment we can make at present. We cannot hope to set up separate standards for English. Furthermore, you will be more useful if you preserve your peace of mind, and only by adopting one consistent, easy, invariable plan can you feel sure—and make pupils feel sure—that your grades mean anything or that there is any possibility of their improving.

In another closely related way you can conserve your nerve-power: by not taking to heart all the exhortation to "stimulate orderly thinking." Every English teacher does what he can in that way, ought to accomplish something; but the total must always be slight. Orderly thinking, like popularity and good nature and charitableness, is not in the curriculum. It is a rare gift. A congressman who can think perfectly straight is everywhere looked for and nowhere found. If most philosophers and economists can really think straight, whence came all the opportunities for reviewers to point out how crookedly they think? No, the power to think straight is not granted to most of us—much less can we instil it. Except in one sense: we can impart a good deal of useful instruction in setting down straight the thoughts that are committed to paper. We can, by reading good themes and orderly passages from literature or magazines, give commonplace minds some ability to substitute for a 3-1-2 order the 1-2-3 order. And constant reference to good examples will enable many pupils to show the reader by connectives that the thoughts are coherently arranged. Education is at bottom a matter of drill in

imitating processes, and English can do no more than to train young minds in following a few simple models of orderly structure. It cannot confer any power. We are not supermen to be charged with a task so ineffably hard.

That idea of "following simple models of orderly structure" has never been grasped in America, but we are beginning to get hold of it. Most of us have allowed pupils to write unoutlined, unprepared-for themes, thus training them in disorder. Or we have gone to the other extreme with elaborate subheaded outlines that do not correspond to any normal framework of a brief composition. Prevision is what we must learn—setting before children a scheme by which they may see in advance the progress through the few main divisions. Simplicity is the need that we must recognize—not sentences, not a dozen headings, not elaboration of major and minor, but just three or four or five titles of the natural groups of thought. Of course the active minds should be encouraged to vary this, to change it completely if they wish; and it should be understood that no one is obliged to write out an outline in advance, for some original brains will not be helped by that process. But minds that get good results without a formal plan are planning informally. Whether the scheme is written, is unwritten, or is formed unconsciously, it exists; a good theme always shows a design. The ordinary high-school writer will learn more about structure if an outline is suggested in advance. The slow and the uninventive must be provided with the simple plan which they will not originate for themselves. The best training for getting up an outline is to read a good first paragraph of a theme and

inquire what its title might be—what one thing it is all about; what one thing the second paragraph is all about; and so on until four or five titles are displayed in sequence on the board. What always needs emphasis, what will produce conviction and cause improvement, is simplicity. A series of four brief titles is proof that order is not merely heaven's first law, but a mundane possibility. Providing an outline is the surest device for securing at least the appearance of "orderly thinking."

So much for the general theory. Later in the chapter are some practical hints for outlining and paragraphing.

Be skeptical about "placing before our classes examples of literary skill which shall be at once models after which to fashion their own work, and an inspiration to ambitious effort." It would be idyllic to follow that program if our classes were composed of a few chosen girls who would make the effort. But most of the boys will not feel the least inspiration, will think you are unfair, and will suppose that you are urging them to be insincere. If you persist against those literal minds, you will wear your heart out; you will not get the esthetic result; you will perceive that you are encouraging outrageous carelessness, accomplishing neither the lofty nor the lowly result; and then you will reproach yourself and distrust yourself and waste energy. Unless you can live on illusions, be blind to hideous facts, and remain indifferent to the plainest duty, the "literary model" plan will destroy equanimity. If you have one clear, simple objective—decent English—your own mind will not be tortured about a criterion. You will have the same kind of business

that a teacher has in any other subject, to require care and precision in simple intellectual tasks. You will not be striding the blasts or summoning spirits into a circle, but will be engaged in a normal pedagogic employment.

Yet beyond and above this you have a chance that does not exist in other subjects. You can encourage interesting writing. You may—you should—have it understood that a lively and entertaining composition is worth more than a dull one. "Here is a theme that is careless in spots, so that by regular arithmetic it would be marked 50; but because it was really amusing it was marked 70." You never know what spark you may kindle by remarking, "This theme is so good that it ought to be handed in to the *Literaria* board." When you read a brisk beginning or a surprising close, quote a happy bit of invention or a neat turn or a clever bit of characterizing, you are reminding the class that you are not a comma-fiend. Read as many good themes as you can find time for, commenting on your reasons for approval. It is generally good policy not to name the writer, for that distracts attention from meritorious work to a complimented person—from the useful to the harmful. Ask the class to give reasons for praising or blaming. Exhibit faults fully, but beware of ridiculing. This kind of criticism, if tactfully managed, is the greatest possible incentive to write interestingly; it introduces that vitally necessary element of social approval.

"Social approval" is a large and valuable idea, worthy of a chapter by itself. A teacher is successful in proportion as he secures the corroborating sympathy of the class; not striving to impose either

his own judgment or a literary standard that is unknown to the class; but bringing to bear the social pressure, convincing pupils that they are required to do only what their social group approves. This thesis is soundly and convincingly presented in S. A. Leonard's Riverside Monograph, *English Composition as a Social Problem.* The idea is not to be grasped in a minute—nor in a month. Have it always in mind.*

Sometimes, especially early in the year, there will be such epidemics of heedlessness that you may do well to announce that there is no opportunity for reading whole themes. Hold up the bunch and say that half of them would keep the attention of the class, that one of them is as good as some sketches that have been sold for money, that three are better than many college students can write, that you wish you might read some of them—but that it is impossible to squander time for pleasure as long as there is so much wild carelessness to deal with. Then sail into them for the rattle-headed spelling and the counterfeit sentences. Keep them informed that commas do not make a theme, that often a theme which you mark 0 is a much finer thing than one marked 90; but that if you don't count off strictly for errors you will leave them uneducated. "You have a gift for saying things with snap; it's a talent that many firms are paying good money for today; cultivate it; I will help you to make it useful by marking every careless theme zero." In any and every way that your tact can devise show them that the strictness with mechanics is only to keep them from being a

*Compare the very interesting experiment with social approval in literature, the third extract in Chapter X, pages 232-238.

laughing-stock to a critical world. Ask them what impression they would get of a stranger who began a letter: "Dear sir youde ought to of let me sel you them goods." Insist that some of them would impress an employer almost as unfavorably. Try to show them that a splotch of ignorance on a page is as injurious as a stain on a white tie—no one can see anything but the stain. Read them what an American poet, R. H. Stoddard, said of Poe's original handwritten copy of *A MS. Found in a Bottle:* "There was genius in everything they listened to; there was no uncertain grammar, no feeble phraseology, no ill-placed punctuation."

The mark after *genius* is not a colon. Stoddard was not indicating that the genius was constituted as follows, but that Poe had certain commonplace abilities in addition to the great one. Keep the semicolon in mind when you decide just what theme-reading is, and for school purposes regard what follows as the climax. If you know what you are aiming at, if you have a single purpose, you will remove the burdensome fear of "Oughtn't I to be doing something else?"

The other way of lightening labor is similar: Reduce all correcting to the simplest arithmetical basis, read once rapidly, deduct mechanically; don't frazzle your nerves by trying to weigh what cannot be weighed, nor tolerate any qualms about the queer result of a low mark for lively writing and a high mark for prosy work. The secret of fair and rapid grading is to establish your "unit error," to indicate the number of these in the simplest manner, to compute in a few seconds what the grade is. Here are the details of marking one freshman theme in the

fourth month of the year. The unit for one class may be changed several times a year, is different for different classes and different schools; but once you understand the scheme you can see what value is needed for the unit in your class. In the case of this particular theme the class has been many times warned about *too* and *their,* etc., has been drilled in simple punctuation, and has learned again and again of the atrocity of a sentence-error. Such errors as omitting a comma before *so* and *but,* misspelling *its,* omitting an apostrophe from a possessive count five each. Such forms as *ladys, Jone's* now count two errors. Because *to* for *too* has been unusually stressed and everyone knows what is wrong the instant he sees it, it counts three errors. You open the theme and begin reading, not expecting to see everything that is wrong, not losing the run of the little narrative, but marking whatever you do see—that will be quite enough. The opening paragraph is not indented; the red pencil dashes down a ¶ about where the indention ought to be. That first paragraph, only two lines long, is clearly a mere introductory sentence; down goes "No Par." Then there is no trouble till the seventh line, where you find *orrange*; you dash a ring around it to show that it must be corrected, but is not counted as an error. Next you find "He said for me to come right in and that he would cook us a supper for us." That is a clumsy change of construction, very disagreeable to you; you would like to write a note in the margin dilating upon the awkwardness; but you do nothing of the kind, for the matter has not yet been spoken of in class. You simply put a ring around *for us* and speed ahead. On the second page

is *who's*. Well, it happens that you have mentioned this only twice, that you are not positive it ought to count double; one line goes under it. Near the end is *comming,* and while it may deserve a treble line, you leniently underscore it only twice. The whole story is decently arranged, reasonably well told; count up. Two for the paragraphing, one for *who's,* two for *comming* = 25; 100 — 25 = 75. Time of reading 275 words not over three minutes; after a year's experience, when you are used to the system and have grown acquainted with the peculiarities of pupils and have removed a large proportion of the first-of-the-year carelessness, you can finish in two minutes.

It is more than likely that this strikes you as not theme-reading at all but as mere addition of bits of scum that fleck the deep waters as well as the roily puddle. Part of your astonishment is due to not dwelling enough on "the whole is decently arranged, reasonably well told." That is a big assumption. On many themes there will have to be structural corrections: of general incoherence, or of monotonous sentences, or of faulty time-order, or of misproportion, or of dwindling interest, or the like. But in first-year work such correction should be of the simplest kind and only in palpable cases. You will be establishing habits of good theme-planning, will have orderly arrangement much in mind; but these larger matters require less attention than you think; the small details are very much more difficult and important than might be supposed, even in the upper classes. You are not doing college work, but are four years below that. Memories of theme-criticism in college may vitiate your labor.

You may marvel at the proposal to measure health

and depth by counting misspellings. If so, don't on any account accept this method. Don't work according to any plan that violates your feelings. I know very well that in the whole opinionated range of this most opinionated of subjects there is no place where a man so insensibly slips into a habit (directed at first by chance, confirmed without analysis) and grows so accustomed to his opinions that he cannot entertain any objection to them. You are urged not to adopt anything that does not appeal to you. Be wary—I will go so far as to say—about adopting it if it does appeal to you. Think it over; make experiments. But on no account theorize. A physician smiles wearily when people theorize about ailments and remedies, for he is so familiar with a thousand forms of illness which reduce to a few of the simplest causes of ill health. A patient's most violent toothache is nothing in his estimation, but he is most solicitous about that pin-scratch. This may be more than an analogy when applied to the author, who sees every month a thousand composition defects, who has taught his thousand boys of all sorts under conditions that oblige him to rate them according to college-entrance ability, in conformity with the same sort of rating for other subjects. He finds that all the weaknesses can be reduced to a few simple kinds. Fewness and simplicity are as much a mystery to him as tetanus is to a doctor, but he has learned the fact. A physician knows that the yellow on a tongue amounts to nothing in itself, that scraping it off will produce no health; yet he sets about eradicating it. He wants to produce such a change in the system that the tongue will grow red. So a teacher is not merely scraping off a symptom when he grades for

mechanical errors; he is correcting and vitalizing a mind, setting up that carefulness which is mental health. When you regard the little errors as an outward certificate of an inward weakness, when you have learned that they can be removed only by severe and protracted regimen, when you have for a long term of years observed how mental vigor is increased after the evil symptoms have been got rid of, then you may marvel at your present skepticism.

We need not depend upon a medical parallel. From three quite different sources I learn that mediocre dramatic talent is most assisted by training in clearness of enunciation. I cannot vouch for this because I never tried it. But I do know by experience with declamations that for several years I failed to get best results because I went in for tone-variation and pauses and dramatic changes. Boys of small ability—the great majority—were perplexed by my efforts. I gradually learned to say, "Make it clear. Take time to make every word distinct." With mere articulation as my first purpose I had a higher average of success. The same sort of thing is true of all arts. Are young musicians—even those of marked ability—taught to "express personality"? They are drilled and drilled and drilled in finger-exercises and positions. Are novitiates in painting and sculpture—even those of special promise—exhorted to create with vivacity and esprit? They study anatomy and perspective. And they are selected individuals, drawn to the studios by the urge of innate aptitude. Suppose that *all* the students of a high school had to know the rudiments of piano-playing or sketching a scene. Sometimes I wonder—only wonder of course—

whether the very fact that the average teacher of English is not an artist in language may not explain why we go to work so much more rhapsodically than the teachers of other arts. Occasionally I wonder how Milton and Kipling would teach English—after ten years of experience.

I suspect they would concede something to literary ability, would admit that two variations of strictly mechanical marking are proper: (1) To deduct something (say not over 20%) for generally faulty arrangement; (2) to reserve the right to add a bonus (say not over 20%, or at the very most not over 30%) for pleasing effectiveness. Then without distraction they could affix grades that would mean something in another school; they could with less labor be four times as useful, since they could read four times as many compositions; they could perform a work for which the colleges would call them blessed.

What should pupils write about? Always about familiar matters in which they have a real interest. It may occasionally happen that a class is so well acquainted with a book that they will care to discuss some character—what was wrong with Godfrey Cass? was Banquo dishonest? If at any time you are sure they have some thoughts which only laziness would prevent their caring to express, assign such a topic; but in general don't. If you ever feel sure that their minds really contain some elementary criticism, try that; but the experiment is of doubtful utility. Give them subjects that they have been interested in. Limit yourself further by the consideration that though they were interested in that tramp, they were not seeing him, as you were,

through literary lenses; they were not calling to mind the dainty character sketch or the dramatic awesomeness of a wrecked life; they were not seeing through him to a pile of words about him. You are always in danger of beginning at the literary end of a subject. Don't. Begin with the thing in itself. What did they notice? How did they feel? Why did they care? In all your explanations of how to go to work, how to arrange a story or present a picture, talk of things, of facts, of examples. You get nowhere by reciting from a book, "Literature, in order to be spontaneous, must derive its method as well as its material from life." Such a marvelously unsympathetic rigmarole comes from a mind that believes that "the art of being natural when we write is something that most of us have to learn." This dictum is too sadly true when applied to the jargon that we teachers use in addressing children. We have been so befumed in the charms of studied spontaneity that we quite forget how to be natural. Think of telling a child that when his story is once started "his next question is how to proceed so as to hold the attention of his hearers." Suggest no such question to him. Start with that thing, that queer happening, that mighty good story, and attend only to that. "Studying the art of telling a story naturally" is a vicious procedure, for it destroys all naturalness and creates the belief that theme-writing is a cult, an esoteric process of weaving intangibilities according to an unseen pattern into an acroamatic abstrusity. Expect nothing from the theory of the text or your own expounding. Give examples. *What* is done in the beginning of *this* extract? For *what particular* purpose did the author start a para-

graph there? *What* was the concluding sentence about? After we have seen that freckle-faced boy outwit the policeman, shall we walk home a placid mile and eat a placid dinner? *That particular* thing that is done in a quoted paragraph they can imitate or adopt or get the point of; the psychological considerations that lead us to theoretical generalizations they cannot use. Nor can you; nor did any artist ever profit by theories. It is the nature of an inartistic mind to apprehend theories; it is the creative mind which sees and represents things. The normal child mind is never analytical; it is somewhat creative. It is worked upon by *that particular example.*

Our young people are so fond of stories, read so many, that most of them can by purely unconscious imitation swing quickly through the "who", "where", "when," and "why" in lively dialogue, can keep the narrative moving interestingly, and can terminate with a "snapper" or significant sentence. They prefer story-writing to any other type. A good device for suggesting a plot and a climax to aim at is to read some humorous anecdote, requiring them to lead up to the situation by getting us better acquainted with the people and what they were about. Description is not so well liked. Try to keep away from inventories like "my room" or "a village street"; suggest life of some kind: a fine dog, the man I admire most, the bleachers, a squall, a crowded car, what makes Monroe Street interesting. Give them a chance for a bit of action or suggestion of narrative to help in placing the picture before a reader. Don't assign "description," but ask for a picture of how it looked and what feelings

it aroused—remembering that this is an age of "moving" pictures. Exposition is least liked. Usually it is necessary to give two or three topics, so that all may be explaining the operation of what they understand at first hand. Always insist that the main effort in such a theme is to bring out clearly what the reader does not know. Hence part of the assignment should specify who the reader is to be. Perhaps he knows nothing at all, like the Hawaiian below; more likely he knows a good deal, as in the case of electric lighting. In either case a writer's first concern, his whole effort, is to realize just what it is that the reader cannot picture or understand, and to make that clear, working up carefully from what the reader does know. Tell them that school texts often explain processes as if for people who already know—thus: "In the first type of the expository paragraph which we shall study, the main thoughts used to amplify the fundamental idea stand to each other in coördinate relation." Tell them they must do better than that; they must really "get something over" to a reader. If they are going to tell a Hawaiian boy how to make a snow fort, they mustn't talk about the "hoary meteor" nor about "the aqueous vapor of the atmosphere precipitated in a crystalline form," nor must they suddenly begin to roll up a ball. They must tell in human language what snow-flakes are like, how snow looks in drifts, how it cannot be rolled in zero weather, how feathery flakes become icy missiles, how big spheres of snow can be made and cemented. Most of the boys know the lingo of the garage; tell them it means nothing to you; you must have plain speech. Wireless or electric lighting or base-running rules or making

bread or tangoing or stage scenery or sailing or how we know what time it is or making honey or how clams live—all must be explained so as to bring out what is not known.

Give optional topics frequently, one for the literals and one for the fancifuls. Or set one *kind* of topic or one central situation which may be developed in any way they like. See whether you get good results by letting each choose whatever topic he pleases. Probably they will enjoy this free choice, and the resulting variety is much more pleasant reading. Often such license has to be limited—as: "No journals of how I spent a week," or "No trips," or "Anything but a story." Warn them against the pointless succession of "We got to a hotel about eight that night. The next morning"—— and so on for a series of samenesses. Developing the little thing is always the best exercise.

In general it is safest to advise against any introduction or summary or conclusion. Such things may be needed in labored essays (though even that is doubtful), but are a good deal worse than useless in themes a few hundred words long. Pupils easily get into the way of writing a preliminary flourish and a puttering close. Urge them to begin at the beginning and stop at the end. Read examples of ways in which members of the class arrived at a strong closing.

Whether to require an outline prepared before beginning to write, whether to require notes, whether to resort to similes of freight-cars and geometry as an aid to good paragraphing, whether to advise furious writing and phlegmatic correcting—this sort of thing I may have opinions about after another

fifteen years. I have not arrived at much of anything so far. How have authors gone to work? One has never blotted a line and another tempers and emends for years. Ibsen helped himself by toying with a trayful of dolls and Sheridan could be forced into writing a mile a minute. Rhetoricus may sort out hundreds of little jottings; a *Gettysburg Address* may be penned without one preliminary memorandum. Some modern authors hire a hack to do their punctuating; some, like Cyrano, would not have their own pointing disturbed for five dollars per comma.

Yet every one has kept his eye on unity, coherence, and emphasis. Every one has had a plan—no matter whether he committed it to paper or not. One person is dependent on that written form, as an architect must first draw plans; another can no more let his fluid scheme get on to cold paper than a spider can distribute its liquid before spinning a web. You have by instinct or habit developed a method of your own. Insensibly this is what you will teach.

It seems to me that by all logic and psychology a preliminary outline must be a good thing. But it may be a mere make-believe that the writer has not used; it may even impede ready and fluent expression. Your textbook will chart the process as confidently as though it were explaining how to lay bricks. You will do well not to share this confidence until your observation confirms it. The plainest *results* can be exhibited from any set of themes. The how-to-obtain is quite another matter. Contrast an interesting, prompt opening with a verbose and tiresome one; contrast three sequent paragraphs with ten tiny and planless ones; contrast the mere stop-

ping of a story with that bright climax that is worth all the rest of the narrative. Examples can be imitated. Theories and methods are ineffective. For many years I never required an outline, but thought I ought to. I am now requiring that on the top of the first page there shall be a numbered series of titles for each paragraph; the directions are "one brief title for each paragraph, so that I can see at a glance just why you divided as you did." This has commended itself so strongly that I shall never abandon it. Though I suspect that half the outlines are simply added after the paragraphing is all completed, this does not worry me. The point is that each young writer feels a responsibility for naming *some time* just what he has been about. Perhaps it does him more good to find out as he reviews his theme that two paragraph titles are absurdly similar or that the third paragraph demands two titles. The plan results in better dividing—that's the whole point.

And what about paragraphs? I don't know. Nobody knows. A decade ago they were the central citadel to be attacked. Teachers directed all besieging operations at them. Sentences were simply outlying breastworks. Even today paragraphing is the subject of monographs and long chapters. My own feeling is this: really effective paragraphing is the outward sign of an inward and spiritual condition; it shows sound thinking. No teacher, in any subject, can do much to develop the power of sound thinking. He can do no more than instruct a dull mind in the forms of reasoning about triangles; can go no further than developing to some extent the knowledge of the facts of Latin syntax. Power to

think originally—well, what do you say? Now, a theme is a piece of original work. We can teach a boy that it ought normally to appear in several divisions and can exact that appearance. We can do more. We can train him (after a fashion) to stick to one part of his subject in each chunk of composition, to carry us from one to the next without too violent a jolt, and to arrive at something better than the middle of his subject. That is no mean result. It is a great big one.

We take our youngest boys (corresponding to the eighth grade or a first form) through that stage of development at which they are able to leave an inch of margin on the left (no slight achievement) and to present a 250-word composition as not less than two nor more than four or five blocks, each of which is indented. We speak of these blocks as paragraphs. We speak often of "one part in one paragraph," but do not go deeper into the philosophy than to point out that "here you begin to tell about what happened next morning" or "here a new person begins to do things" or "here you go to a different place." The next year we insist more definitely on having a reason for paragraphing. From the beginning we discourage the one-or-two sentence paragraph, especially the separation of that introductory sentence of the first paragraph as if it were an introductory paragraph to the whole theme. We try to get separate paragraphs for dialogue, but otherwise maintain that a 300-word theme would seldom need six divisions. In the third year we keep up an incessant command, "Name the topic." We are always inquisitive as to why this division was made or why no division was made there.

Take plenty of time when you assign the first theme to give exact instructions as to form. Make everything explicit, say it twice, leave nothing to be taken for granted. There is to be a margin at the left one inch wide, and there is to be no margin at the right. There is to be a title set well up above the first line, each word of which (except articles, conjunctions, and prepositions) is to be capitalized. Announce the required length as "not less than so many words"; for if you say "pages," you will have to accept half-measure from some. At the top of the first page there shall be "just one brief title for each paragraph," numbered to correspond to the paragraphs. Pages are to be numbered, are to be arranged in the right order, are to be folded in one way; the name is to appear on the side you specify.

You gather up the sheaf the following day and take it home to read. Use the very simplest marks. Some schools publish an incredibly long list of symbols to denote the kinds of errors. How many they actually use, how accurately the students know what they mean, I cannot say. Nor can I condemn the method, because I have never given it a trial. I have, however, some indications that it cannot pay for the extra care and time it demands. There must be an advantage to the student in finding out what is wrong. Not that I ever puzzle him. I never mark a kind of error which has not been fully commented on in recitations; or if I do, I write a brief explanation in the margin. Occasionally I have to make sure that he sees the reason for a correction. If, for instance, he has one parenthetical comma and has forgotten the other, I draw a ring around the

comma, run a line over to where the other comma ought to be, continue the line out to the margin, and write "Two." I may draw a long line under a series of words on either side of a conjunction and write in the margin "Punct." Sometimes I may run a line from an unpunctuated *who* or *where* out to a "Restrictive?" in the margin, but I avoid most time-killing memoranda and notes and queries and stinging rebukes and humorous comments. Usually a big exclamation mark or a huge X or a huge √ will do more work. In marginal comments I seldom rewrite anything or try to do more detailed criticizing than just to say "Clumsy" or "Change" or "Rewrite." (At the end of the theme I may write a sentence or two of general criticism or of directions for recasting or of encouragement.) I often pass over oddities of diction. I sometimes judge that a form like *Not at all, that's not true* is "really" a sentence error, but that I will not count off for it; though I require it to be rewritten with a semicolon. If there is only one carelessness on a theme, or if there are two or three rather slight faults in a good piece of writing. I may mark "+=100," which means that general excellence has caused the small blemishes to be excused. Similarly if the writing is generally heedless I may count off somewhat more than the arithmetical total or count up the smaller errors unforgivingly. I dash a ring around such queer things as "the kens of the police", "to float on the currant", "again once more"; but I am not much concerned with them. Occasionally there will be in one sentence a double error—e. g., "And, to my small knowledge there haven't been many bad wrecks on the New Haven." The phrasing is clumsy, mixing

two idioms and conveying nothing; but that is a once-in-a-great-while matter compared with "two commas or none." So, to avoid a complicated lot of correcting at one spot, I indicate the punctuation and say nothing about the wording. The misused comma may seem to you insignificant compared with the clumsy phrasing, but it is really the greater error in freshman English. Such a phrasing may be typical of a careless mind, but is not a typical form of carelessness. We must watch for the everlastingly recurrent particulars, following the Lawrenceville motto that "The only inexcusable fault is carelessness." On the back of some themes I jot abbreviated memoranda of what needs comment before the whole class—of what is eternal and typical. Then I give a harangue about "the same old things that we have been hearing all these months"—like *laid* for *lay;* and I try to get time for some of the more common kinds of clumsiness: "the body was cut and scratched with numerous finger-marks", "refrains from hitting him with the excuse" (*with* causes more absurdities than any other word), "since they both were in each other's company" (*both* is a constant nuisance).

It is always the same old things. The more experience you gain, the more you will see that all avoidable awkwardness and all attainable graces reduce to a few simple fundamentals. Do you strive for maturity in sentences? Attack *so,* ceaselessly putting on the board *so that, and so;* attack *so he could not,* always suggesting *and so could not.* Inveigh against the aimless repetition of words. It passes all belief how a pupil never hears his own sentences until you read them before the class; how

month after month he will persist in saying "Then we came to a cliff; at the foot of this cliff"; how he cannot give up that repeated noun; how after you have three times trailed your red pencil across one of his pages to show nine *boats* or ten *rooms* or eleven *Indians* he will submit you a page with seven *schools* on it. If you keep at him and keep at him, you are revising his whole mentality, making him attain to all the maturity he will ever be capable of. Would you have variety in sentences? Don't present any theory of monotony; insist that all subjects must not come first; read the beginnings of ten babyishly similar sentences on Tom Jones's theme. Then plan to follow Tom up, to hound him, to get finally a page on which four subjects are not first. Read a string of consecutive simple sentences from Marian Chevalier's story, coming to the end of each with a thud, showing what they sound like. Read five consecutive compound sentences from Bob's description, dwelling clankingly on that infernal *and,* until the class hears what monotony is. Rehearse and rehearse and rehearse some decent complex sentences *beginning* with a dependent clause and closing strongly. Hold up for laughter that aimless habit of saying "Nothing at all was happening, *when suddenly* something portentous happened." Inquire and inquire and inquire whether they are not willing to *begin* with a *while* or a *just as.* Those are the operations that prevail upon dull minds to imitate something approaching a mature and varied style.

It is always the same few old things in punctuation. You might guess from Chapter VIII that a universe of complexities was before you. By no means. No high-school pupil will ever look uneducated in

writing if he habitually attends to six perfectly simple matters: commas with nouns of address, commas before words that mean *but,* comma before *and* "when the subject changes," quotations, non-restrictive words, and a semicolon for grammatical independence. The last is worth all the rest. Mark non-observance five times as severely. Don't speak of "comma-blunders," for we have found that term confusing; call them "sentence-errors." Swear by all your hopes of success to hate them. Lay your hand upon the altar and vow, by all that is sacred in education, that you will eternally maintain feud against them.

In slighter matters plan always to observe what are the few recurrent ways of showing ignorance or being tiresome. Study to avoid non-essentials, to have nothing to say about your prepossessions, to pass over some colloquialisms or downright slang. As a non-essential I am inclined to classify *shall.* To be sure I mark it, speak about it, ask for it; but it is a foreign idiom to most of the new generation even in the plainest indicative. To require "He said he *should* like to go" is almost to destroy faith in your ruling against *had ought.* As a prepossession I will instance the case of a novice teacher who once marked a parsing paper zero because an eighth-grade boy had omitted periods, and a teacher of twenty-five years of experience who insists that *where* cannot mean *whither,* and my own self who for some years fought needlessly against *dove* for *dived.* As slang about which nothing need be said I suggest *fake, pinch, getaway, hike, exam, dinky*—why write them? To declaim against all ephemeral terms is to discredit yourself. If they appear in such a dignified

setting that the class will see the humor when you read the sentence, they may be worth a comment; but a teacher who tries to taboo them as wrong *per se* will only lose the confidence of unesthetic boys. (I don't know about girls; perhaps they would be docile.) In contrast to such not-to-be-noticed things are a few tiresome words like *near-by;* nowadays every drug-store, all trees, all streams, all theaters are "near-by." *However* is used too much, and half the time as a mere loose linking, with no notion of its meaning. *Due to* perpetually appears with the meaning *on account of;* indeed it is so common that I am wondering if it may not establish itself. Participles are required to perform the most extraordinary feats—as, "Rowing out about a hundred yards, the stone was dropped overboard." Some young writers will insist that their initial *a's* and *w's* are "meant to be large." Others will most unaccountably capitalize an occasional noun; most of those who write *latin* will speak of an *Inn.* By some similar cockneyism they will repeatedly refer on the same theme to a man as *which* and a country or a pet alligator as *who.* Be on the watch for similar cases of faults that are persistent and common, so as to get emphasis on them and not be wasting time on what is unusual or non-typical.

One of the best ways to save eyesight and time and temper is to insist that syllables be joined and words be spaced wide apart. Laboratory experiment has shown that nothing else so retards a reader as carelessness with spacing.

When I deliver the weekly harangue on the week's compositions, I aim at the simple, the necessary, the same old things that were spoken about last week

and that are going to recur a month hence. An error thus denounced in public assumes an importance that it may not have in private conference: the snickers of the class are convincing. So far as possible avoid naming the offender. This makes him resentful and—here is the real reason—distracts the attention of the class from a principle to a personal "sting." The reading of extracts, good or bad, the reading of a good theme, the scoring of a bad one—all should be impersonal.

I very seldom require rewriting of themes, but always have them corrected by the following time-saving plan: the pupil first goes through his theme numbering every mark I have made; then on a separate sheet, numbering to correspond, he writes his words and sentences as they ought to be; folds this in the theme and at the next recitation hands in these corrections. A pupil who is careful has little work to do; one who is careless would rather rewrite entire.

In all your contriving and exhorting bear in mind this little allegory: Once upon a time an apostle of Apollo, carrying his violin, met a Wyoming sheep-herder who was buying provisions in a grocery store. "Let me play you this charming thing," said the apostle, "so that when you are back on the range you may try it *upon your shepherd's pipe.*"

CHAPTER X

READING

Why do people read? If that seems too universal to admit of an answer, narrow it down to a particular book and a particular person. Upon the reply depends your whole conception of what it means "to teach literature." If the answer seems obvious, close this book and ponder an hour before you open it again. Any solution offered to you ready-made is worthless, but your own earnest thoughts may be as a light to your feet.

Do you happen to recall Whittier's poem, *The Demon of the Study?* When "she" read a tale of woe, there were tears in her eye; and a merry song would make her voice as glad as an April bird's. But the demon read hour after hour in the self-same tone. He was a "reading fiend." Whittier did not know whence he came. We know. He comes from that *sense of duty* about literature, that feeling that we ought to read. All specializers in English have read as a business and have felt that they ought "to supply their most serious deficiencies." It has seldom been an irksome duty. "The stout old man with the greasy hat" has not taken the joy out of the *Ode to the West Wind;* he has not really obsessed us; many of us have been quite unconscious of his presence. Whittier had more sensitive perceptions. He felt that hidden motive—that Apollo's wares are precious and that we must busily gather

heaps of them—which impelled him to read and read and read; and he personified the impulse. All things that bore the government stamp of the kingdom of the muses were objects of the poet's desire. "She" very likely had not the least use for *The Rape of the Lock* or *The Tatler*. Probably there were weeks when she did not read a page, and never felt one covetous pang for the literary treasure she might have piled up in those days. Whittier credits her with being the right kind of reader.

Should there be any such thing as an "ought" when it comes to reading? If a person finds no pleasure in *The Lady of the Lake*, ought he to train himself into a condition in which the poem is "not so bad after all"? Should we as teachers feel that pupils ought to like *Two Years before the Mast*, and that it is sad if they prefer Potash and Perlmutter to *Sesame and Lilies*? Or should we say that reading is a pleasure, a luxury; that when we make any attempt to alter and educate tastes we are violating the very spirit that makes literature valuable? Even if we seem to succeed in luring the barbarians from the *Cosmopolitan* to Thackeray, have we really benefited them? Have we not merely adorned the surface? Is it not a process of painting the leopard's spots? To put it concretely: if "she" had not cared for poetry and if Whittier had put her into his English class, would the results have been worth while?

I should never have known how vehement the usual affirmative is if I had not once happened to attend a certain "round table." The discussion languished. The experienced teachers were hopeful of nothing; the novices feared to ask questions. After an embarrassing period of silence the hour

was saved by a girl's self-sacrifice. She propounded: "Why is it that pupils don't like to read the classics?" There was a tempest. Every one of the fifty-eight ladies was ready to rise and speak her thoughts. For the life of me I could not guess why. The query seemed to me as natural and as useless as if in a Bible class someone should ask, "Why is it that people don't like to be good?" I have seen a class enjoy *The Vicar of Wakefield,* but not in the sense in which they "like" the *Saturday Evening Post.*

I was soon enlightened. The novice and I were alone in a dark pit, and torch-bearers came from every side. It appeared that pupils *did* like the classics. One lady asserted that she could not recall a single instance in her career of the failure of a class to like a piece of literature. No others could go as far as that, yet all thought the dislike was exceptional. Imagine such a question in such a company! Try to imagine my Whittier question in such an environment. The base and cowardly cold-heartedness of it would have filled the room with tumultuous pity. Worth while to try? Why, it was tragic that anyone should fail. I caught no least indication that the "worth while" question would have been regarded as a sane one.

Perhaps it is not. It may be like asking, "Is it worth while to try to save human souls?" Since it is generally conceded that every person has a soul and that there is a way to save it, a minister who answered "no" would seem to deny his calling. Most teachers invest their profession with this sacred character. A boy who has been taught to enjoy Shakespeare has been saved.

Probably you are already imbued with this notion. You will find it breathing all about you from the moment you enter on your labors, from every colleague and every "suggestions for teachers." If you meet with discouragements, remember that there is a teacher in the world who does not know that he ever induced one human being to like a piece of literature. This confession may comfort and sustain you, because it is likely that hundreds of teachers are no better off.

Why do people read? Excluding all of us who are haunted by the fiend and all who read so as to be able to say they have read (notice I shift to "they"), why do people curl up with a book? Because they are after pleasure, wish entertainment. No author wants his work perused on any other terms. No one who reads for any other reason is honoring the writer. If a friend of yours never looks at a novel that is more than three years old, you may feel sorry for him because such a great lot of pleasure is denied him. Do you try to convert him? Do you feel that he ought to be saved esthetically?

That is where the whole world divides into two classes, the missionaries and the others. If your instinct is, having the light, to pass it on, your life will be an effort to convert pupils to the beauties of literature.

It is a noble instinct. The world needs more of your kind. But there is a chance that you will be more effective in proportion as you sympathize with the other fellow. How about being missionaried? Are you yourself most apt to be converted by the person whose manner announces, "I propose to influence your soul"? As for me, my soul retires into

a corner at the first intimation of such a design. I resent any effort to lure and proselyte my spirit, and I have noticed that young people are singularly like their elders in the matter of mental autonomy. If I see a friend getting five dollars' worth of pleasure out of *Siegfried* or a league game, I may learn to covet his source of happiness, may catch the contagion; but not because of any effort he makes to persuade me. People who whole-heartedly enjoy their children or their tobacco never seem concerned to convert bachelors or non-smokers. Genuine delight never worries about influencing other people; yet it is making converts all the time. *The English Leaflet* 13 contains a whole gospel of "inspiring" in one sentence: "I remember a very poor teacher of literature who lived in an atmosphere so sincere, so generous, so humanly sympathetic that her pupils left her enriched and strengthened for actual living." Somehow I suspect that this woman never coached herself to inculcate a love. It is likely that she simply tried to be honest and thorough in her daily business.

How responsive have you been to those intellectual missionaries who have tried to kindle in you some appreciation of their gospels of physics or astronomy? Has your soul been roused to apprehend the culture offered by modern science, or do you merely tolerate it in a benignant way? Have you thoroughly realized that there is a mental exhilaration in radium and Peruvian ruins and wireless and the fight against cancer beside which *Il Penseroso* is feeble? Three years ago a boy who was not very keen for Milton's minor poems introduced me to a science book which had, if rightly

read, more stimulus for the imagination than most of us can get from *Paradise Lost.* Literature is not the only treasure on that strand where Newton and Browning have to be met together if they are rightly met. Goethe, whose emotions could be so profoundly stirred by *The Vicar of Wakefield,* occupied his soul with the theory of light. May a teacher of literature not be in danger of assuming that the right kind of spirit is absorbed too exclusively in *Intimations of Immortality?* of forgetting that the literature string is not the strongest in the human harp?

But granting the full worth of this desire to enlighten, it must be ever borne in mind that no art is so difficult as converting. Billy Sunday has a gift that converts thousands; Bunyan and King David could hardly save themselves. One professor has the knack of turning thousands of young men into the paths of good reading; another can only feel that stony-ground agriculture will not pay in the long run. Imprudent and unsympathetic zeal may do incalculable harm. The instant you step out of your own personality in an attempt "to inspire a love of good reading" you wrong yourself and the class. You may get a galvanic result—some reaction that is jerkily strong—but you will set up no steady current. You may plant seed, may add fertilizer; but God alone can give the increase. Thank Him for it if you find He has given you the gift. Don't get melancholy if you find yourself unendowed. English literature has propagating powers of its own. They tell me that nowadays great reliance is put in medical missionaries, men who do not directly aim at soul-saving, but who lay splendid foundations. If we unfortunate teachers, of lesser talents,

will minister to the mere information of the barbarians, we can feel that we accomplish something.

To be genuine, to be frank, never to allow that taint of hypocrisy to enter into what we say, will insure against evil effects and never detract from good work. Few persons can be perfectly frank with themselves in this matter, much less with others. In this very chapter, for example, after all my revising, all abandoning of hedging statements, there is an irreducible element of pretense and humbug. One dreads to appear a cold, denying spirit; would like to echo what is so conventionally warm and humane; is forever tempted to deceive himself by imputing to himself motives which it is generally supposed he ought to have. I speak of this because, knowing that I am not an exceptional being, I must suppose that others in their publicly expressed opinions and advice have had a little of my weakness. And I think it may put heart into some first-year worker if I give him this hope that he is not such a miserable failure after all. I am sure that in my own first years such a word would not have lessened my earnestness, and would have been a real source of cheerfulness. You can do better when you are cheerful.

You have noticed that there are persons to whom babies will always go and persons who are the life of a party. The most crafty scheming will not lure the little ones, nor the most eager determination add to a party's merriment. But patient study of bait and pools may enable you to get a little nearer to the record of that fellow who always has the biggest catch of fish. Think of these cases when you sit before a class.

The *English Journal* reported three years ago some very interesting data that were collected in Illinois and elsewhere. "What do pupils enjoy?" was answered from hundreds of reports of class votes on the books read in school. The questionnaire was prompted by the feeling that we ought to prescribe what pupils like, or at least that we ought not to prescribe what they very generally dislike. The same tendency has been apparent in the changes of college-entrance lists. *Lycidas* was dropped, and substitutes offered for Burke's speech and Carlyle's *Essay on Burns*. It has been contended that this is false pedagogy; that making things easy is a way of making intellects flabby. Perfectly true of the ordinary subjects, whose merit is that they are hard. But *Lycidas* was not written to offer difficulties; Johnson disliked it because it was easy. All literature was designed to give pleasure. If it is made an instrument of mental drill, it is—offer what other defense you may—being perverted from its function. That is the kernel of the whole discussion. May it not be abnormal and wrong to try to teach a love of literature?

Examine yourself, for doing that honestly is the only way to find out about the other fellow. What author were you ever "taught" to love? The man who could teach me to love *Sesame and Lilies* doesn't live. What percentage of teachers could persuade you to love *The Idler* or *The Alchemist* or *The Task*? Suppose that you are a great admirer of *Night Thoughts*, what proportion of a hundred teachers sitting at your feet could you convert to your admiration? Ninety-nine would like the *Dedication* of *Barrack-room Ballads*, but that would be

due—to you? Suppose that Mrs. Tingley took the chair and by her personal magnetism inspired ten to love theosophy; should you think well of the converts or long to emulate the converter? If you are in a literature class, which kind of force do you wish operant upon yourself, that of Mrs. Tingley or that of the *Dedication*?

The comparison ought not to be pushed. It is unfair and scornful. Moreover it may be objected that we are quibbling about a definition; that skill in giving literature its opportunity to charm may be all that is meant by "inculcating a love." Yet we surely are discussing something immensely more important than a definition. We are speaking of a stimulus, often a strong one, that some teachers give. We see it in other subjects. One teacher has inspired many pupils with a devotion to algebra; doubtless another has imparted an interest in Latin; certainly the right teaching of physics or geography often rouses enthusiasm. The work of ministers is more than an analogy: some of them are able to inspire a love of religion.

Here is the point, then, where I am expected to smash comparisons with a logical battering-ram. I have not the mental strength. It appears to me that we are all alike; that the highest function of all teachers, of all decent citizens in every profession, is to inspire somebody with a love of something. I am writing this chapter just because I cannot see why English teachers should think themselves specially commissioned to shed sweetness and light on an otherwise dark and tasteless curriculum. We do so distinguish ourselves. College catalogues speak of "developing a taste for good literature" when they

describe English courses, whereas announcements of music or history or art speak only of such unspiritual matters as knowledge or proficiency. The file of *Leaflets* is pied with such gorgeous claims for good English teaching as: "spiritual enlarging and kindling", "insight into character", "inculcation of a love of books", "affection that springs from delight." Did you ever see in discussions of other branches any parallel to these ecstasies?

May we not properly apply a little skepticism to a creed containing these extraordinary articles, and scrutinize the evidence? Granted that this power of inspiring exists, what percentage of high-school teachers have it? Half of them? Make a list of those you know, putting a check after the names of the inspirers. But perhaps this is unreasonable. It may be fair to maintain that every teacher has some spark of the kindling power, and that in his work he ought to apply it to combustible minds. There is the real issue: Should all teachers have for an object what few can fully attain? One of us ordinary persons, with some skill in simple matters of knowledge or clearness, can guide a class to a reasonable understanding of a book; if we are in a fine (and artificial) frenzy of making-them-love-it, much of our work is vitiated; the total effect of a recitation may be a lesson in insincerity. Especially is this true of women teaching boys, because the roughest boy is a delicate galvanometer for detecting affectation.

How frank and deep-rooted is this love of literature which we are so conscious of, which we talk and write about so much? It has always appeared to me that the non-musical person who has trained himself to enjoy sonatas is the one who declaims most about

loving music (and leaves me cold); while one who has music in his soul will rap my clumsy fingers—and kindle me. Aren't we English teachers in danger of appearing to be sentimental enticers if in our age of steamships we play the part of sirens on Literature Straits?

Only three years ago that question would have been considered blasphemous. Now you may hear affirmative answers on all sides. I subjoin three extracts from the *English Journal* for 1915. The first describes the danger; the second and third are two different ways of facing it.

(1) A third misconception regarding English work is that it is the mission of the teacher of English to get pupils to admire greatly a small list of works of good literature of a particular type, and that when they do not specially care for these books the work is largely a failure. But human life has a wide diversity of feelings and interests, it is embodied in personalities of every kind and type. If literature is an expression of human life, or if literature is an appeal to human life, it must be as varied as the life of which it is the expression or to which it makes appeal. If a certain type of literature does not appeal to a pupil, it may be simply because the outlook of his mind on life gives it a range of interests which that literature does not satisfy.

Not long ago I had a conversation with a friend, a man who has some position and reputation as an educator, and in reply to some enthusiastic words of mine on the value and significance of poetry, he said: "I cannot bring myself to care much for poetry. I do not see why a man should care to read such stuff when he can read something worth while on as inter-

esting a subject as evolution." Much of what the teacher presses upon the pupil's notice as the most valuable literature this man rejected as mere stuff; and yet he was regarded as a man of much intellectual ability. We need to remember that a pupil who in spite of all our efforts thinks that *The Sketch Book* is dull, and *Evangeline* silly, and *Ivanhoe* slow and uninteresting may still cherish some valuable intellectual interests.

—*Roland S. Keyser,*
Jamaica Training School for Teachers.

(2) We teachers of literature find ourselves in a different position from our colleagues. We speak of literature as primarily a thing to be *enjoyed.* Other departments treat their subjects as primarily things to be learned. We expect our pupils to be interested and delighted, from the outset of their work, and all the way along. Our colleagues ask *their* pupils to *work* and *learn,* and, if they hold out any hope of pleasure, it is, "You'll like it better when you come to understand it; it will be interesting when you get farther into it." We have got our problem clouded. We know well enough, we teachers of English, that we have ourselves had to do real work to come by some of our interests. And we know, too, that some fields of literature, some books, some authors, will never interest us. We don't see our task clearly, as the teacher of mathematics sees his. He says to his pupils, "Here is a piece of work to be done." He is not likely to say anything about interest or pleasure. If the pupil does the work, and enjoys it, so much the better. But pleasure is not held out as a bait. There is no cajolery about it. Now the danger about cajolery is that, though it works well enough

when it succeeds, it is worse than nothing when it fails. Unsuccessful cajolery reacts against its author like an unsuccessful lie. And lying is a difficult business, Hamlet's remark to the contrary notwithstanding.

Now many of our indirect attempts to arouse interest and pleasure react against our influence because they fail in this way. What wonder that the pupil comes to disregard our judgment, question our intellectual weight, distrust our sincerity? Such a book is to be read "for pleasure." The pupil finds it dull, even though it be a great novel, like *Henry Esmond.* He has been misguided; he has been told of an intellectual garden of bliss, and, lo, he finds no such place, only a waste of stones and ashes.

Why not assume a different attitude? Why not say, rather: Here are some typical books of various kinds. They are chosen because they have been approved, not only by those who make courses of study, but by generations of those who know, and like, and even those who write, books. They are an important part of the intellectual property of the race to which it is your fortune, good or bad, to belong. You are expected to know them, and others like them, if you are to become educated—even moderately educated. They are as much an established part of your educational obligations as science, history, mathematics are in your present grade, or as arithmetic, geography, and spelling were in your earlier years. You are expected to know them for reasons of about the same sort that you are expected to dress neatly, to speak clearly, to have good manners, and to obey the moral law—because your fel-

low-men demand it of those who qualify for a certain stratum of social life.

—*Franklin T. Baker,*
Teachers College, Columbia University.

(3) Sometimes the high-school course works as a sort of vaccination to prevent their ever taking literature seriously. Indeed, many of our graduates emerge triumphantly diploma-ed, with their old untrammeled originality in spelling and sentence structure, but with a new relief in their hearts that they have lived through "litercher" and may hereafter read what they please. And the public, which devotes about 99 per cent of its influence to bringing about this very result, does occasionally use the remaining 1 per cent in sternly demanding to know why English teachers don't teach English and develop a taste for real "literachoor." (It will be noticed that the amount of emphasis on the final syllable is an index to the speaker's seriousness.)

The truth is that literature teachers are devoted champions of a lost cause. To change the figure, they are swimmers battling against an ever-strengthening current of seething modernity. Today it is harder than it was even ten years ago to arouse any sympathetic interest in Milton, for instance. Some of the dead authors appear to be so irrevocably dead that no amount of artificial respiration can put any breath of life into their works, so far as the ordinary high-school student is concerned.

* * * *

From my previous experience with separate classics I had discovered that many students feel vaguely that these old books are forced upon them

by an educational conspiracy. They do not believe for a moment that any normal person would freely choose Shakespeare's plays and the *Spectator* essays when reading for his own enjoyment. They do not formulate their suspicions, but they might put them thus: "In the undated past a group of old fogies put their noddles together and agreed that certain musty, fusty volumes should be called classics, and that every unfortunate youngster should finish his quota of this moldy diet before being allowed any real literary food or candy. Since then, whenever a board engages a teacher, it makes her solemnly swear to pretend that she and everybody else prefer the classics to all modern literature. And so the teachers don't dare to admit their liking for living authors, but have to earn their salaries by going into superlatives over Shakespeare and Addison and the other dead ones. The more a teacher praises a thing, the less good it is, just to read; she has to praise it to keep her job and prove what a great scholar she is. The thing for a student to do is to keep his mouth shut about not liking a classic, and just learn what the teacher wants him to say; for she would fail him if she knew what he really thought."

There is also a prejudice against the biography of authors as being a useless and inexpressibly tiresome hodge-podge of names and dates. A student's impression of a composite author's biography would read something like this: "So-and-so was born in an unpronounceable, unspellable place that nobody ever heard of; his parents, though poor and apparently insignificant, were people of great interest in literature. He was not on good terms with his

teachers because he preferred his own choice of studies and occupations to theirs; and his fame later on showed how much better he knew what he needed than they did. By-and-by he married a woman who either made him superlatively happy and successful, or else broke his heart and crippled his genius. His early writings were attacked by school teachers and other moss-backed critics, but he won fame by touching the great heart of the common people; or else his work was very popular in his own day, but nobody can see anything in it now. All his life was spent in places hard to remember, doing things with dates nailed to them; and he finally died and was buried in another place that the teacher makes everybody learn. *What of it?"*

* * * *

In addition to these prejudices against old books, against biography, history, and the essay, there is also a well-marked distrust of poetry, especially on the part of boys. The number of high-school students who voluntarily read anything more than humorous or topical verse is small indeed. Many boys have an ingrained dislike of poetry, because some teacher has overdone allegories, or figures of speech, or "speaking pieces," to use the old term. Besides, many boys at the adolescent age manifest a fierce shyness, an utter revolt against the expression of emotions. Some poetry strips the soul stark-naked by its intensity of feeling. Imagine the difficulties of teaching it to self-conscious boys and girls. The high-school student is just at the age of most painful sensitiveness: it is astonishing to learn what trifles cause real suffering. Even skilful and kindly teachers frequently jab bare nerve ends without the

faintest idea that they are doing so. Bold and self-assured as some of the lads look, they secretly writhe under many forms of embarrassment. The study of literature, and, most of all, the study of poetry, is the very thing they need to free and broaden their sense of personality, to develop and guide their emotions. But unless they can be made to feel at home in what they read, it is worse than useless to them.

* * * *

Another very common difficulty is the fact that many children early form the dreadful habit of reading without visualizing. Their imaginations are atrophied, so far as the power of reincarnating a printed page is concerned. Some actually have almost no power to get the thought of a poem, a bit of description, or even a drama, until it is read aloud and discussed in class. To translate words into pictures, statues, perfumes, music, or human reality of any kind is almost beyond their power. The teacher has to give them constant training to develop their imagination.

* * * *

Pondering over these prejudices and limitations of the average high-school student, I decided that absolute sincerity and coöperation should be the two guiding principles of my work with my literature classes. My first step was to take my students into my confidence, get acquainted with them, and make them realize that I was deeply interested in their real opinions and would never penalize them for telling the truth. Knowing that students love to experiment, and to do things in a grown-up way, I told them how the course in English literature was usu-

ally taught, and how we were trying to improve the method. I made it clear that my purpose was to teach them how to *know* literature, how to read and judge it; and that their likes and dislikes were entirely their own affair. From the beginning to the end I tried to make them feel that everybody's business was to help everybody else without interfering with his personal rights, and that I would hold sacredly confidential anything that they told me upon that agreement, or anything which they asked me not to share with the class.

Day by day in informal conversations, I gradually led them to tell me what they thought a course in English literature ought to be, what kinds of training they needed most, what are the big problems in studying literature. If I had expounded these ideas to them, they would have rejected them as part of the traditional stuff that teachers are paid to cram down the student's throat. But when they discovered problems for themselves, their whole attitude toward literature began to change. For instance, they began with a vague idea that the materials for such a course should all be chosen upon the basis of enjoyment. But when they had heard the various contradictory opinions in a single class about a bit of literature, they saw at once that no choice could be made that would please everybody; and they lost confidence also in the old idea that only teachers like certain things. Then they decided that it would be wisest to study all the "great" things.

It took me about two weeks to make my students feel that it was safe to tell me what they really thought, and that I was not trying to make everybody agree with me. No matter how rash and preju-

diced an opinion was, I received it seriously, pointed out and had the class point out the grain of truth in it, and then by questioning the student and others tried to make them carry the idea farther. As soon as I felt sure that they trusted my sincerity and would express themselves freely to me, I had them write answers to a questionnaire.

* * * *

The students were so interested in the idea of helping me fit the course to their needs that they wrote from two to six pages of definite information on these questions. This set of pages was the most interesting set I ever read because of their frank revelation of the minds of the writers. They formed a very valuable index to the hundred and forty new personalities in my charge. I tabulated on cards the gist of each answer, and for some time continued to add discoveries, and to consult these personality cards whenever I wanted to wake up a lagging student or assign an appropriate piece of individual research work. The teaching of literature is fundamentally a matter of interpreting different minds to each other; the teacher has to know intimately both the book and the student before she can bring them together successfully.

* * * *

Since I laid no emphasis upon their *liking* the famous pieces of literature, but instead demanded that they know a great deal about it and have full reasons for their opinions, it was no longer a point of honor with the students to dislike classics. Some of them discovered that they could learn nearly as much and do nearly as good thinking about a thing

they disliked as about a thing they liked. A good many of them learned to look within for the causes of certain opinions, frankly criticized their own lack of mental energy, imagination, observation, vocabulary, and the like, and set about improving themselves. They gradually learned to regard anybody's opinion about any piece of literature as a mere personal symptom, and often a temporary symptom at that, and they gained interest in looking for the cause of the opinion. And all the time the range of their enjoyment broadened.

—*Elizabeth Hodgson,*
High School, Wichita, Kansas.

In all our thoughts about literature it is well to bear in mind that one of the shrewdest of English critics wrote an essay entitled "Is It Possible to Tell a Good Book from a Bad One?" His conclusion was that it is not possible. But it is always easy to tell a good reader from a bad one. The bad one cannot visualize; the good one sees gorgeous tragedy go sweeping by.

Have no thought about inspiration. Prepare yourself by reading the assigned book over and over again. It is astonishing how the closest familiarity that you can get by yourself is inadequate for the searching demands sometimes made by inquisitive youth. You will find the average pupil strangely ignorant of those essentials that impress you at a first cursory reading; while, on the other hand, some small non-essential, that you quite failed to notice, stands out in his mind like a pinnacle. Your objective is a clear understanding of the essentials, as: Where are we? Who is acting? What did he do?

Why did he do it? What kind of person was he? What did character number two think about number three? Have no fear of the most simple and obvious questions. Indeed you had best at first fear any other kind. You never know when you are going to uncover the most remarkable ignorance. If a pupil misconceives, don't set him right. Let another pupil do it. Perhaps the first one has an unexpected defense for a curious notion. You never can tell. Get them to debating. Admit no evidence of the "I think" kind; always exact the reference to what the author says. A recitation that continues for ten minutes as prosy as a bird-cage may unexpectedly open into fresh air.

For secondary classes I am a devotee of the written test at the beginning of the recitation. In my first year's work I got into a hopeless bog with a volume of poems. The class seemed to know less every recitation. The simplest outstanding facts escaped them. One day I announced that the next lesson would be a very short review; that there would be a five-minute test in which they must show definite knowledge, expressed without the wriggling and looking for help that made oral recitation so valueless; and that I should then devote the rest of the hour to reading aloud, line by line, with comments and questions. I was not thinking of the test, but of the chance to force some comprehension into their brains. And lo! a miracle. They studied differently. Somehow that thought that they were to be left alone in a silent test period, forced to show that they knew something or nothing—that made a difference. What they had floundered in they soon learned to make a path through. The written test is a great help

for composition; it leaves the teacher more time for reading aloud; it relieves him of the distraction of keeping a record of oral recitation. But more than all these combined is the training it gives in reading attentively. The same principle may be applied if a class finds any text hard to understand. Allow five minutes or so for a careful reading of a page in class, announcing that at the end of the time you will assign a topic for a test. When attention is thus concentrated, pupils overcome hard passages with an ease that is very enlightening. Explain the principle: That kind of concentration on each page, as if for a test, does twice as much in half the time.

Beware of that pedagogic weakness, talking too much. What we say, like what the rhetoric text says, amounts to much less than we suppose. Our brain-capillaries distend, and in the heat we may speak well and impressively; the pupils' brains are inert. It is often impossible to avoid taking the floor ourselves, but in discussing a literature lesson it is well to be a mere moderator as far as one can without bad waste of time. Reading aloud is apt to seem waste of precious minutes—often is; but what is heard is remembered better than what is read. So long as attention is alert and so long as you feel real purpose, time thus spent is valuable.

It is with diffidence that I suggest that anything like a critical attack of literature is a mistake in secondary classes. You are steeped in it. For some years you have hardly thought of a play but as an object of critical appreciation. Many texts are edited in an atmosphere that reeks with the fumes of estimate and analysis; edited with the fear of not showing enough scholarly acumen. Even such rea-

sonable queries as "By what means does Goldsmith heighten the effect of the discovery that the house is burning?" are on the wrong track. Steer thus: "How did the Vicar feel as he got near home?" This is not the difference between tweedledum and tweedledee. It is the two sides of the footlights. The class belongs in the audience. A normal reader never bothers the stage door. He always "likes that cuss" or wonders why Soandso didn't tell. We have no business to call a pupil's attention to a pasteboard rock or to an elocutionary trick that puts a lump in our throat. We have no right to suggest that Goldsmith threw down his pen at this point and beat his head and paced the floor before he got the right device. Goldsmith doesn't belong on the stage; the Vicar is doing very well alone. At least reserve the author for his call when the play is over.

Annotations are sometimes a rock of offense and sometimes give grateful shade in a weary land. It is better to use them too little than too much. Every note is good that keeps a pupil from misconceiving an author's general purpose in a passage; every one is bad that distracts from that purpose or that superadds information. If you are studying *Macbeth* carefully, it may be barely worth while to explain that the "dollars" were not paid in American bills; to explain the etymology of the word is one of the most freakish crimes of pedantry. A comparison of an old Rolfe or Deighton edition with the recent work of Neilson or Schelling will be illuminating. Unless you are doing this sort of close study notes should not be kept in the foreground. Have little to do with verbal difficulties. The criterion that nearly always applies is: "Will this make the picture more

clear?" Hence sketch-maps are often most useful. Not that it matters whether a certain stag escaped in Fife or the Hebrides, but that Scott had a map in his mind, and we follow his story with more interest if we have some idea of its locus. Anything that supplies a substratum of conceptions (like "What was a cross-bow?" "The Holy Grail?" "The French Revolution?") is a necessity. Anything else is likely to be a hindrance. The *Essay on Johnson* requires few notes. The *Farewell Address* will not show its hidden fires (it really is fiery) until a reader can think of many conditions in our early history.

More valuable than class work will be any reading you can require or encourage as supplementary, not to be recited on, perhaps not even to be tested. One way is to assign a novel, giving a brief test on a hundred pages or more each week. In seven minutes you can find out whether a pupil has read attentively an assignment of two hundred pages, if you require answers *with one or two details* to the simplest, most matter-of-fact questions. Avoid the type of question that admits a hazy, bluffing answer; give no credit for a reply that might have been guessed at by one who had merely heard a friend's outline of the story. Another plan is to require reports on books selected by the pupil (his choice to be first approved by the teacher). Get pupils to sample books for you, and so build up a list of good ones that are generally liked. It is hard to judge by your own taste. I should have guessed that sixteen-year-old boys would like *Kim* and would find *Lorna Doone* too sentimental, but the opposite is usually the case. There can be a system of extra credit for books read voluntarily. One teacher in a private school tells me that he

now gets several times as much reading done by this "supplementary" plan as he did two years ago in his "dark ages." This kind is the real kind. Dissection in class is less thought of than formerly—a statement sufficiently meaty for the end of a chapter.

CHAPTER XI

ODDS AND ENDS

RHETORIC

Some textbook in Rhetoric is prescribed for you. Regard it as the foundation of all your work. Though you disapprove some parts, dislike some peculiarities, it must be the basis of all you can accomplish. It marks out where you are to build and indicates the kind of structure you are to raise. Follow the specifications until experience shows you where to vary the prescribed plan. The text presents a diversified lot of things as of about the same importance; your task is to discover which topics are minor and which are major. And remember that the text alone, be it mastered never so thoroughly by the class, accomplishes almost nothing. The principal error that we all make, and can never entirely get over, is reliance on the efficacy of the text. Teachers are all keyed up to rhetorical distinctions, so that when they are struck by anything the least novel they perceive it with excited attention. Again, a lucid presentation of familiar notions seems to them convincing; what it stows in their minds is lively and operative. Youth is not so affected. After ten—yes, after twenty—years a teacher still suffers the same dismayed amazement at finding that what was understood clearly and recited upon accurately *is not doing any work.* The matter of *shall* and *will* furnishes an illustration. A boy who apprehends

clearly, as a theory, when to say "I shall" and when to say "I will" may the next week wear a questioning frown over the X through his "will" in a theme. It is the same old, unending difficulty. It is a truth frequently harped upon in these pages. It is a lesson for you. Constant repetition should teach you. It will do nothing of the sort. You will never know it till you have been through the exercises. A pupil will never know about *shall* until by repeated and repeated and repeated exercises his own work has made it a part of himself. A boy from an exceptionally refined home, whose own speech was refined, once recited passably on this mystery of *shall* and *will*. On the exercise in the text (filling in blanks) he got zero. The class returned to the exercise, and he got zero. A week later he got 30% on that identical exercise.

Nay more. The teacher had omitted all entanglements of "the form you expect in the answer," and all the rest of it. He was trying for nothing more ambitious than to cultivate the habit of "I shall" and "we shall" when no assurance is implied. (Schools cannot establish a complicated set of idioms, and ought not to try.) This simplest of simple changes in a fixed verbal habit is the moving of a mountain. To get the merest temporary results, as a mere drill, is an achievement.

The text is a necessary foundation; it is not a structure of knowledge, however lively and sympathetic. And any part that is not sympathetic is not even a foundation. What is conceived in the spirit of critical abstraction makes no impression on a pupil's mind. Even the most lively and persuasive chapter of text can do no more than open the way to

improvement of style. All advance upon that way is a matter of practice; no real progress can be made except by the use of exercises. Real development and lasting improvement are secured only by exercises. In proportion as you gain experience you will hunger for exercises, will regard text as a mere index to the real work, will rely for permanent results on the actual handling of a great deal of illustrative material. The rhetoric that seems to me the most effective one on the market (Herrick and Damon) succeeds largely because of copious exercises based on entertaining selections.

Every year I try harder to find out when we take up a rhetoric topic *how far back the ignorance reaches.* One example will serve for all. "Figures of speech" are promptly attacked on the basis of "Is it good or bad?" For several years I was confounded by the excessive stupidity displayed. Bright boys were declaring that it was "bad" to compare martyrs to watering pots, and failing to object to "The cold hand of Death stalked into our midst." I had to grant a certain good taste to their verdicts: separated from context the good metaphor may be ridiculous, while the bad one may have a suggestion of tragic dignity. What was wrong? Why must I always be overruling sensible boys' feelings? Because they did not know the simple, fundamental truth that a figure is a comparison of something with something, that genius can contrive a fairly fitting comparison of anything in the universe with anything else in the universe, but only a rare genius under exceptional circumstances is allowed to compare that anything with *two* anythings *at the same time.* I have never been able to persuade them about

the watering pots; the best I can do is to compromise on: "What is compared to what? Is it compared to two whats at the same time?"

You are marveling at my slowness of apprehension, at my lack of sympathy. Then you get the point—that utter failure to detect underlying ignorance. I can hardly believe it of myself as I spread it on the record. May it save you from any similar failure to get way down to the bottom of the trouble. A whole class is never stupid; once in a while a teacher may be.

The dean of college theme-writing in America says that he always had trouble to distinguish between metonymy, synecdoche, etc. One day it was revealed to him that there was no need of knowing. Similar revelations have cleared several big obstacles from my own path. But the need of knowing the central fact about figures of speech—"what is compared to what?"—is vital for apprehending a lively style or for livening one's own composition. The longer we teach, the more we see the value of extending this form of exercise. All bungling and mixing of figures is primarily a failure to know "what is compared to what."

I am very skeptical about the wisdom of "cultivating a vocabulary," because it may result in such testimony as this, written by an eighth-grader: "This year we have not done much writing as we have been very busy on other subjects. . . . We also had some large words to digest among them, "Campanology", "Peripatetic." Much can be said on both sides; all depends on the practical sense of the teacher. I will content myself with one observation: Searching for an idea is always a useful occupation,

even if the hunt is vain; but a meal of big words may not digest.

I am very skeptical about the wisdom of finding errors in selections from Thackeray, Kipling, Scott, *et al.* In the first place, they are probably so unimportant that you have no time for them. Secondly, there is always the peril that the author may have known what he was about.

We are all too likely to forget that the models introduced (selections from authors) are *parts*. The opening of a book, the description of a room, the paragraph that summarizes, the page of dialogue—all are fragments of a large whole. They are models only in certain aspects. The motifs behind them and the architecture to which they conform may be antipodal to any sincere effort that a child should make. A volume of short examples of skilful writing has recently appeared—an excellent and much needed device. But they are much too long and they are still too obviously fragments. Try to find a few short models to put before the class, samples of something like their kind of subject matter. How about the real thing—the best compositions written by members of the class? How about the school theme as a somewhat unreal product, which may in time be regarded as we now regard "samplers"? How about an effort to make themes a bit more real by assigning topics that might be the burden of actual letters or a living desire to persuade someone to do what you want?

HISTORY OF LITERATURE

It is often argued that a history of literature should not be attempted in schools, because we have

to deal with such tabloids of development, such morsels of criticism, such a pile of opinion that cannot be based on reading. The effect of unentertaining biography has been humorously described on page 233, and other objections, unquestionably valid, could be adduced. But, after all, these objections apply equally to an outline of American history, and the schools know that that study is one of the most valuable subjects in the curriculum. So experience shows that the right history of literature, if rightly handled, is a valuable, an almost indispensable, part of a school course in English.

Most texts are vitiated by critical phraseology and the unsympathetic use of abstract terms. If you are allowed to choose, decide against a book which says that the Saxons "worshiped gods who were the personification of the forces of nature" and choose the one which says that they made the Christian missionaries preach on a little island in the open air because "they had no idea of hearing strange teachings under a roof where magic might easily overpower them." The difference between those two presentations is the difference between sleep and waking. Discard the book that refers abstractly to Goldsmith's eccentricities and adopt the one that names the scarlet breeches. Try to gather anecdotes and striking facts about authors; aim at some picture of them as persons; endeavor to convey a definite impression about the one most striking feature of an author's work, rather than criticism and estimate and catalogue of names. It is much better to omit half the writers and concentrate on the big names than to secure an indiscriminate blend of many authors. A chart will do more in a minute to rescue

Marlowe from the twelfth century than half an hour of rehearsing dates.

MEMORIZING

All my life I have regretted that in my youth I did very little memorizing. Men without any pride in literary attainments have been glad of little poems or passages that became theirs in school. Tell your classes such testimony. The why of it is harder to present. When time can be spared, assign a memory lesson.

TESTS

It is better to have short and easy lessons, strictly graded, than longer assignments that are loosely accounted for. The same principle holds for examinations. Fairly simple and direct questions, graded more strictly, are better evidence of a pupil's knowledge and better training for him. He is spurred up by finding he did not know the easy topic; disgruntled and self-excusing if he thinks he failed because of catch-questions. Every English examination (unless it is mere grammar) must be understood to be a test in writing. Perfect knowledge and careless writing may be worth anywhere from 60 to 0, according to circumstances. It ought to be 0.

Always plan tests and examinations with a view to easy grading—i.e., how much each part is going to count, and how definite are the units that you have a right to require.

Don't make an invalid of yourself by correcting papers. The more you can handle, the better. But make a time limit of reasonable hours and refuse to be killed. Study ways of speeding up the correcting. Some sets of class tests can be graded in very short

order, and with justice to all. You may pause to see if Susie has a sentence-error, but Algernon's paper shows at a glance that it is worth 100. Don't let the conscience destroy the nerves. Set an arbitrary standard (a good brain should have known enough, e.g., to put in reasonable order four points out of a possible six) and grade mechanically, always reserving the right, if it doesn't take extra time, to add a little credit for an original handling. If you have required a long exercise to be written out, don't try to read the entire paper. Grade on the basis of a selected fourth or fifth of the work. Find the quick way. The excessive amount of time and nerve-force used by some teachers in marking papers is suicidal. Work easily. Keep the mill running. Never stop to debate the "mightn't I be unjust?" Always study for serenity and celerity.

STEMMING THE TIDE

Have nothing to do with the crusaders who fight for logical purity or academic nicety or lexicographical sovereignty. You have too much else to attend to. You will need to slaughter "I seen" and "they done," but you can refuse to notice those subtleties of long *u's* and broad *a's* and "guess," and of diction generally. In no department are most of us so wrong-headed as in pronunciation. To try to drill a class in "rūle" and "läugh," where those sounds are not native, is to destroy the respect of pupils for your judgment in other matters. You may have to insist on "picturesque" in three syllables, because no educated human being pronounces it in four; but you are not to inculcate "oc tó pus" just because that is the only pronunciation given by the *Century*.

Don't even waste energy on stemming the tide of "it is me." Never use the logic of these tide-stemmers as a weapon. The fact that *is* never takes an object is no guarantee that "it's me" is wrong. "Seen" is not vulgar because of any grammatical ratiocination; it happens that careful people do not use it as a preterit; just as it merely happens that present-day collars are not ruffs.

CHARITY

Remember that *The Spectator* was in its day the new and non-classical thing, the ephemeral frippery of its age. It is safe now to put *Tom Sawyer* on our reading lists; imagine the hardihood of doing it twenty-five years ago. The taste of the average reader may not be so much in need of directing as we think.

Be patient with what appears so stupid. The next time you are tempted to complain of the dullness of pupils sit down for an hour with something you know nothing about—say electrical potential, or our federal judiciary, or "selling short," or what "rhythm" means as applied to French verse. By the time you have attained a crystal-clear conception you will feel charitable toward the mental failure of a child who has not grasped a new idea.

KEEPING INFORMED

Resolve at the outset, and renew the resolution frequently, not to be a victim of pedagogic sclerosis. In no subject is it so easy to harden into wrong convictions. What begins as a mere choice or impulse may in time grow to seem a momentous principle.

Subscribe to the *English Journal,* a monthly pub-

lished at the University of Chicago Press, at $2.50 per year. English is at present a welter of opinions. Changes are upon us and more are coming. You will be more sure of yourself if you follow developments. This book gives frequent evidence of how useful the *Journal* has been to the author.

The *Bulletin of the Illinois Association,* a leaflet published eight times a year, contains many articles of a practical and directly useful nature. Teachers of English may be placed on the free mailing-list by sending their names to Professor H. G. Paul, Urbana, Illinois.

A similar bulletin, the *Leaflet of the New England Association of Teachers of English,* is published monthly during the school year. The subscription is a dollar a year. Address The Editor, Newton, Mass.

DISCIPLINE

Perhaps you are thinking: "Yes, yes, but what about the actual details of the first five minutes and the first week?" Unless you are unusually fortunate you will be dealing more with discipline than with the beauties of *Evangeline.* Petty disorders or concerted botherations will distract you. Advice about handling these would be as futile as directions to parents about punishing children. But handle them. Remember that the individuals before you in the classroom are normally decent human beings, as individuals. As a body they may be demons. Be prepared for this. An even temper (or a savage one), hitting the other fellow first (or turning your unsmitten cheek)—whatever your method is, go out for good order. Dismiss esthetics until the ground is ready for the seed.

Discipline is the exercise of personality; hence no person can advise another about it or analyze his own methods or follow his own analysis. The only hint I ever got that helped much was this: "You are not contending against a crowd, but against individuals. Only as you get acquainted with individuals, make individuals respond, can you handle the crowd." All good discipline comes from the display of strength, which may be manifested by a quiet serenity or by a cruel sarcasm or by humorous intimacy—or in a dozen other ways. Whatever the expression, strength is the fact. A teacher who scolds is weak; one who argues is weak; it is weakness to threaten what you will do "if"; it is always a weakness to lose self-control, or to talk angrily; it is utterly weak to plead for good order.

Beware of being led into talking. Pupils love nothing better than to raise questions for the sake of killing time and amusing themselves. In no way is a teacher so easily fooled as by that hope that he is charming a class with a dissertation. Ten to one he is duped by some clever boy who doesn't know the lesson.

A WORD ABOUT DISCOURAGEMENT

In Milton's outline of school studies he proposes that Italian should be mastered in those odd moments not otherwise provided for. If one who has himself done a little teaching can be guilty of such sublime nonsense, what may you not expect to have urged upon you who teach "only English"?

I have heard a man describe how he taught his wife and daughter to swim before they went into the water. I am not joking; neither was he. If such

a prodigy of tuition is reported, how ready will the world be to declare that you are an inefficient teacher of "just English."

The country is full of the records of wonderful results in mother-tongue instruction. Shall we waste in despair—you and I, the mediocre ones? Not until pedagogy is so developed that Italian is taught incidentally and swimming is learned by sprawling half an hour in the sand.

The world loves to wave before us these Miltonic dazzlements, to shame us with tales of English Edens newly made over there at the end of the rainbow by some god-like teacher. But if discouragement comes from hearing of lofty deeds of education, think of King Arthur. When the light and lazy Gawaine proposed the quest of the Holy Grail, it was the king who inveighed against the splendid undertaking. On what ground? He granted the holiness of the project, but protested that it would ruin Camelot and restore paganism. His prophecy was fulfilled. It applies in fulness of wisdom to us knights of the Table Round of English. Our vows should not bind us to "follow wandering fires," but by plain tasks of knighthood to preserve Camelot.

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